Hafa Adai!

Yumul bill appropriates $600K collected from e-gaming devices. PAGE 2

MHS teacher resigns in wake of report about alleged misconduct. PAGE 3

$1

Saipan Tribune

Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 13
THURSDAY JANUARY 18, 2024
www.saipantribune.com
www.facebook.com/saipantribune

Unauthorized entry leads to SCHOOL LOCKDOWN

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Chacha Oceanview Middle School was placed on lockdown and will remain on lockout for the rest of the week after an unidentified male entered the campus yesterday morning.

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A man who entered the Chacha Oceanview Middle School yesterday morning but refused to obey protocols prompted the Public School System to completely shut the campus down in an attempt to remove the individual. The person then left the premises before the police arrived.

See LOCKDOWN on Page 4

Torres' arraignment set next week

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Torres

Former governor Ralph DLG Torres is set to be arraigned on Monday in the contempt case filed against him by assistant attorney general James Kingman.

Pursuant to a penal summons Torres was served in conjunction with the contempt case refiled against him by Kingman, Torres must appear before Superior Court judge *pro tem* Arthur Barcinas to enter a plea in relation to the charges against him.

Kingman has also asked the court to schedule a status conference on the same day

See TORRES on Page 4

Rota Resort owner denies abandoning resort

» Owner aims to make it a world-class golfing destination

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

FERDIE DE LA TORRE
The Rota Resort & Country Club in Sinapalu, Rota.

Thompson

The owner of Rota Resort & Country Club insists he has not abandoned the resort and is, in fact, planning to transform it into a world-class golfing destination that's close to Asia.

In line with this, Rota Resort LLC and its owner, Hee Kyun Cho, through counsel Colin M. Thompson, are appealing to Public Lands Secretary Teresita A. Santos to reverse the decision of the Department of Public Lands' Administrative Hearing Office dated Dec. 5, 2023.

In that decision, administrative hear-

See ROTA on Page 4

Aldan: Military projects should be assessed infra developer's tax

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

It is the Tinian leadership's position that most, if not all, military-related construction activities on the island, such as the divert airfield project, should be assessed a developer infrastructure tax, according to Tinian Mayor Edwin P. Aldan.

In a letter to Public Works Secretary Ray N. Yumul, Aldan asked for help to ensure that the developer's tax

See ALDAN on Page 4

FERDIE DE LA TORRE
Tinian Mayor Edwin P. Aldan.

INSIDE

LOCAL
In line with the theme "Green Spaces, Memorable Places," presenters at this year's MTEC Summit on Friday, Jan. 19, will be taking their message outdoors.
PAGE 5

WORLD
A barrage of U.S., coalition and militant attacks in the Middle East over the last five days are compounding U.S. fears that Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza could expand.
PAGE 13

LIFE & STYLE
Winter storms and cinema closures in North America didn't dampen the opening weekend for " Mean Girls.
PAGE 15

SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.

GOT A NEWS TIP? TEL: 235-6397 / 235-2440 FAX: 235-3740 EMAIL: editor@saipantribune.com

Local

Yumul bill appropriates $600K collected from e-gaming devices

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee chair Rep. Ralph N. Yumul (Ind-Saipan) presides over a meeting in the House chamber yesterday morning. One of the bills discussed was Yumul's local bill that appropriates $600,000 in revenues collected for Saipan and Northern Islands pursuant to a local law that imposes a local license fee on all electronic gaming devices within Saipan.

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Rep. Ralph N. Yumul (Ind-Saipan) has filed a local bill that appropriates $600,000 in revenues collected for the Saipan and Northern Islands pursuant to a local law that imposes a license fee on all electronic gaming devices within Saipan.

Under House Local Bill 23-38, of the $600,000 that have been collected, $400,000 will be appropriated for the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation for various projects within Precinct 3. The expenditure authority shall be the chairperson of the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation or his designee.

The remaining $200,000 will be appropriated equally ($100,000 each) to the Saipan Mayor's Office for personnel/operations, and to the Saipan Higher Education Financial Assistance program for the scholarship of students on Saipan and the Northern Islands.

The mayor of Saipan or his designee and SHEFA board chairperson or his/her designee shall have the expenditure authority, respectively and they will be responsible to report all expenses to the Department of Finance secretary.

Yumul said in an interview Friday that the bill appropriates electronic gaming revenue for projects in Precinct 3, most specifically in the western Garapan area.

"So in essence, e-gaming is not really bad. It actually generates funds for the community to do more. Now we can address cleaning up western Garapan," said Yumul, who chairs the House Ways and Means Committee.

At yesterday's House Ways and Means Committee's meeting, Yumul said Saipan Local Law 22-6 has already generated over $600,000. Enacted by then-governor Ralph DLG Torres in 2021, Saipan Local Law 22-06 imposes a local license fee on all electronic gaming devices within Saipan, inclusive of poker amusement machines that are located in the same e-gaming facilities or hotels.

Yumul asked committee members yesterday to go ahead and adopt his legislation and send it to the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation and have the SNILD chairman address the many issues of Precinct 3 and some other precincts.

Yumul said the funds came out of the electronic gaming so he believes it should address Precinct 3 issues.

The committee agreed to adopt the bill and send it to the SNILD for its action.

DPS still on the lookout for Okaruru

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Department of Public Safety is still on the lookout for Joshua Okaruru, a man who was reported missing by family members back in December 2023.

Okaruru

As of Wednesday, DPS has yet to locate Okaruru, who was last seen on Dec. 19, 2023.

"As of today, Okaruru still has not been found. DPS, along with his family members, is still seeking the community's help on his whereabouts or any information that may help locate him. Please call 911 or the Criminal Investigation Bureau at 664-9042," DPS stated in an online post last Wednesday.

DPS spokesperson Fred Sato said that the investigation into Okaruru's disappearance is ongoing.

"Joshua is still missing [and] the investigation is still ongoing. We are in contact with the family members. I did a follow up and family members have shared that they have not been able to contact him. It is still an active missing person's case," he said.

Sato shared that Okaruru was last seen walking near the Garapan Fishing Base on Dec. 19, 2023 before he was reported missing on Dec. 20, 2023.

"He was last seen walking along Beach Road. From that time, he never went home. I was told that he suffers from mental stress. which is something the family is concerned about. We've been doing searches. Family members are also searching, but he's nowhere to be found," he said.

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

OUR PLATFORM

No matter which advertising platform you choose, we can help you deliver your ad message to your target audience

▶ PRINT

Pinned FB post
FB Video
FB Stories (Poll. Swipe Up)
▶ FACEBOOK

IG Post
IG Stories
▶ INSTAGRAM

Banner Skycraper
Right Tile
TAGA Plus
▶ WEB

FOR MORE ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES,
CALL (670) 235-NEWS (6397)

MHS teacher resigns in wake of report about alleged misconduct

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A Marianas High School teacher has resigned, effective last Friday, Jan. 12, 2024, according to a statement yesterday from the office of Education Commissioner Dr. Lawrence Camacho.

Although the statement does not identify the teacher involved nor the circumstances behind the resignation, it comes on the heels of reports of an alleged "misconduct" involving an MHS employee.

MHS principal Jonathan Aguon earlier addressed in an email sent to parents last Thursday rumors of a "faculty member" accused of alleged misconduct. That email also skirted the issue about the alleged "misconduct" and the identity of the person involved, and merely cited a "faculty member," which could be a teacher, a teacher aide, a librarian, or a school administrator.

Camacho's statement yesterday narrowed down the possible person involved to a teacher, saying the CNMI Public School System affirms the resignation of a former MHS teacher "in the spirit of transparency and community engagement."

It also said that PSS and MHS assure it's "committed to providing a safe, supportive, and high-quality educational experience for all students."

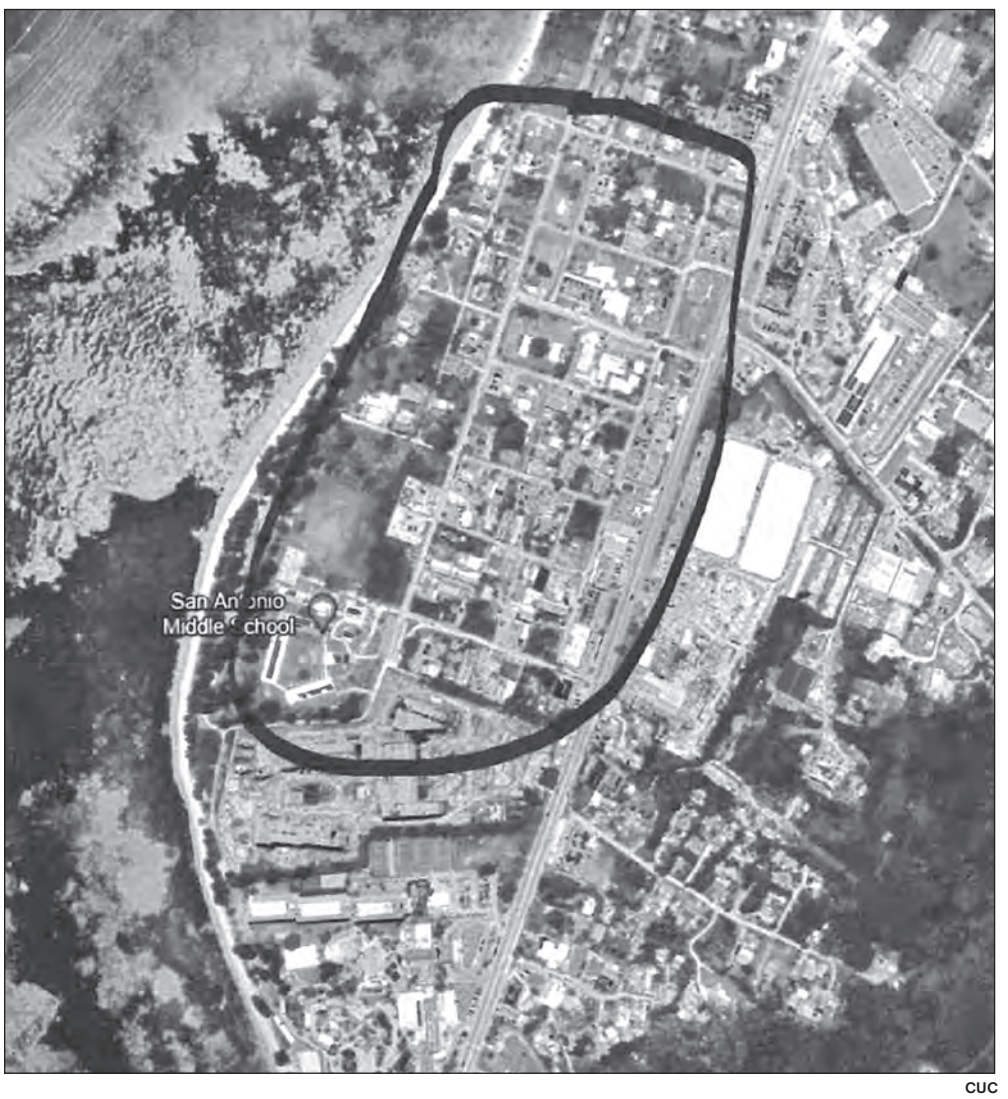
The release also attempted to placate community concerns about the subject. "We understand that transitions can be unsettling, and we want to assure the community that we are dedicated to maintaining the standards of excellence that MHS is known for. Our priority remains the well-being and education of our students, and we will work diligently to ensure a smooth transition for everyone involved," said Camacho.

In response to *Saipan Tribune*'s inquiries of the alleged misconduct, Camacho said last Friday that the "matter in question is currently under investigation."

Multiple independent sources have reached out to *Saipan Tribune* claiming to know details of the alleged misconduct, but we are temporarily withholding publishing these information as they could not be independently verified and confirmed by official channels.

Both PSS and DPS have not revealed any details of the alleged misconduct, but social media chatter has divulged what type of misconduct allegedly happened and identified the MHS teacher who is reportedly involved. *Saipan Tribune* is withholding those details for now until authorities officially release that information.

Scheduled water service interruption today in San Antonio



CUC

The map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s scheduled water service interruption in San Antonio today, Jan. 18, 2024, from 8am to 5pm.

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the general public that there will be a scheduled water service interruption in San Antonio today, Jan. 18, 2024, from 8am to 5pm.

The water service interruption is necessary to facilitate the work of Tropex Garden, CUC's contractor, for the San Antonio Waterline Replacement Project. This is to connect the new 8-inch water line to the existing 12-inch main line.

The work aligns with the project to replace the existing, undersized ACP water lines at San Antonio Village with new and larger PVC pipes.

The San Antonio Waterline Replacement Project is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Tropex Garden's contract covers the replacement of existing ACP with PVC pipes, appurtenances, and the relocation and reconnection of the existing water meter to the proper right of way.

CUC appreciates the public's cooperation and understanding as it works to ensure reliable service for its customers.

For more information, contact CUC's hotline at (670) 236-4333, visit its website, and monitor our Facebook page for the latest updates. For emergencies, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(CUC)***

CNMI DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
NO.: RFP24-OPD-42400033

SUBMISSION DATE: MARCH 6, 2024 TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"BUILDING RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES PROGRAM – MICRO BEACH MITIGATION SCOPING ASSESSMENT"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS RFP CAN BE MADE TO THE OFFICE OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BY FEBRUARY 16,2024, TO MR. CHRISTOPHER SABLAN VIA EMAIL AT chris.sablan@opd.gov.mp

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ ELIZABETH S. BALAJADIA
ACTING DIRECTOR, OPD

/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-24-009

ROTA WATER CAVE ENCLOSURE/ REPLACEMENT OF WOOD STAIRS

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Rota Water Cave Enclosure / Replacement of Wood Stairs in Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists, in general, of the installation of a new 2-inch Sch. 40 G.I. Pipes Stairs and other related work. The work shall be done in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications and without disruption to the daily operation of the water system.

This project is funded by a grant from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Public Law 20-61.

CUC requires the Project to be completed in **150 calendar days** from the date of award of the contract.

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by a Site Visit is scheduled on **January 24, 2024 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-24-009, Rota Water Cave Enclosure / Replacement of Wood Stairs Project"**, to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Comme cial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on February 13, 2024**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A Bid Guarantee of *fifteen percent (15%)* of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety.

A *Payment Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent and a *Performance Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety or other surety acceptable to the Attorney General. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract. Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered bidders and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 26, 2024**, to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Mr. Edgar Tuazon, Project Engineer – via email at edgar.tuazon@cucgov.org and Ms. Christie L. Sablan, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician – via email at christie.sablan@cucgov.org

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids for any reason and waive any defects in said bid proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Man in drug trafficking case to serve 240-month imprisonment

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A man who had pleaded guilty to drug trafficking has been sentenced to an imprisonment term of 20 years.

U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona Manglona sentenced Qiu Shuo, also known as "Ike," to 240 months in prison for drug trafficking, firearm possession and bribing a former Corrections officer.

Specifically, Qiu got a 180-month prison sentence for possession of methamphetamine with the intent to distribute, and conspiracy to bribe an official and bribing an official. In addition, he got a 60-month prison term for possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

Manglona

Manglona also recommended that Qui be placed in a facility with a drug abuse program and mental health counselling program.

According to court documents, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, with the NMI Drug Enforcement Task Force, executed a search warrant on Qiu last Jan. 12, 2022, in a hotel room where he had been staying in the past six months. Authorities seized 1.6 lbs of methamphetamine, an undetermined amount of cash, and two handguns with ammunition during the search.

Qui had stated that he was mainly supplied by two people who would give him between 100 grams and 500 grams of drugs, depending on how his sales had been.

As for the bribery case, an indictment issued on Feb. 2, 2023, accused former Department of Corrections officer Rainier Relado Deleon Guerrero of receiving methamphetamine and $500 cash in exchange for smuggling a cell phone into prison in January 2022.

Qiu and Jiang Guang Zhang, aka Fat Brother, were charged with bribing a public official, and conspiracy to bribe a public official in relation to this case.

Qui pleaded guilty to both cases last year.

ALDAN

From page 1

is being enforced and collected on Tinian projects.

Yumul told *Saipan Tribune* yesterday that he has asked acting DPW Building Safety official Yvonne B. Tenorio to get him a report and that he will do a follow-up today, Thursday.

Aldan said military activities on Tinian have resulted in numerous construction activities and infrastructure developments that should have generated additional revenue for the island.

Although the Commonwealth Code specifically exempts the U.S. government from any liability to pay any taxes, contractors of the United States are not covered by this exemption, Aldan said.

Because the payment of this developer's tax is dependent upon the "building safety officials'" verification of the total project cost, which falls within the purview of Yumul's authority, Aldan said he is asking for Yumul's help to verify if this tax is being properly assessed.

Aldan also asked for Yumul's assistance in providing the Tinian leadership with an accounting of all developer's tax collected from 2018 to date.

The U.S. military's biggest project on Tinian right now relates to building a divert airfield, which will allow the U.S. Air Force to use Tinian as an alternative landing site or a divert airfield for its planes in case Anderson Air Force Base in Guam is inaccessible due to war or calamities.

TORRES

From page 1

in the ongoing criminal case against the former governor. This is because there is still no trial date in the criminal case against Torres where he is accused of misconduct in public office relating to first-class travel and theft.

"The court has twice before requested that the parties provide their preferences for the trial to be set. For both parties, operating without a scheduling order is detrimental to the effective administration of justice," Kingman said.

The original case against Torres was filed by the Office of the Attorney General on April 8, 2022. Torres was charged with 12 counts of misconduct in public office and one count of theft relating to the issuance of airline tickets for business class, first class, or other premium class travel for himself and/or Diann T. Torres, his wife. The case also alleged one count of contempt for failure to appear in compliance with a legislative subpoena.

The former governor has denied the charges.

On Aug. 23, 2022, judge *pro tem* Alberto Tolentino dismissed without prejudice the contempt charge against Torres. On Oct. 26, 2023, Kingman refiled a separate charge of contempt and misconduct in public office against Torres.

On Dec. 19, 2023, Barcinas directed the prosecution to refile the penal summons against the former governor due to improper service.

Kingman refiled the penal summons the next day, Dec. 20, 2023.

LOCKDOWN

From page 1

Saipan Tribune learned that COVMS implemented a schoolwide lockdown late in the morning after an unidentified male individual attempted an unauthorized entry into the campus.

PSS and the Department of Public Safety declined to provide details of the incident, but several unnamed sources said a male individual entered the campus at around 11am yesterday morning for unknown motives. It has yet to be determined whether the man is related to anyone on campus, and what his motive was for entering the campus unauthorized.

The individual allegedly did not adhere to the campus' security protocols, which led to a heated verbal altercation between him and the school's staff. The man allegedly refused to comply, so the campus initiated a lockdown and called for police assistance. However, the individual left the premises before authorities could arrive to question him.

As of 4pm yesterday, the school was no longer in lockdown but remains in lockout to prohibit the entrance of unauthorized visitors on campus.

DPS has yet to issue an official statement on the incident.

In a PSS statement recounting the events of yesterday, it only said that the school initiated a lockdown at around 11:30am yesterday "to ensure the safety" of all students, staff, and individuals on campus.

"This is in response to an unauthorized campus entry," said PSS.

It said that DPS was called immediately, and the school executed emergency procedures.

It added that the school transitioned from a lockdown to a lockout at around 1:40pm, prohibiting the entrance of unauthorized visitors on campus.

PSS also assures parents, students, and COVMS staff that security has been amped up to ensure the safety of all.

"To ensure continuous safety, DPS [remained] on campus until 5pm. Classes remain in operation for the remainder of the week with extra security measures in place. The PSS and COVMS administration take the safety of our students, staff, and stakeholders very seriously, and we continue to ensure that we uphold this priority. We thank our stakeholders and community partners for their patience, assistance, and cooperation," said PSS.

ROTA

From page 1

ing officer Ramon S. Dela Cruz denied Rota Resort's appeal of DPL's termination of its lease agreement over approximately 150 hectares of public land on Rota.

Dela Cruz had ruled that Rota Resort LLC's failure to pay rent to DPL as required by the lease agreement was inexcusable, and so was Rota Resort's failure to use the premises for 90 consecutive days. His ruling described this as effectively abandoning the leased premises.

DPL said that, based on its records, Rota Resort LLC owes DPL $101,277 in lease and interest fees for the period beginning July 1, 2020 to Nov. 30, 2020.

In Rota Resort's and Cho's appeal to Santos last Jan. 4, a copy of which was obtained by *Saipan Tribune* yesterday, Thompson said Dela Cruz erred in several ways.

Thompson said Dela Cruz erred in concluding that the *force majeure* clause does not apply to payment of rent or abandonment. Force majeure refers to an unforeseeable circumstance that hinders a party from fulfilling its part in a contract.

Thompson said Dela Cruz erred in determining that Rota Resort is no entitled to the benefit of the *force majeure* clause because it failed to establish the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and that Rota Resort was required to pay DPL no later than Feb. 6, 2023, and could terminate the contract for default on March 8, 2023.

Thompson said Rota Resort definitively established that the pandemic was the proximate cause "in whole or in part" of Rota Resort's failure to perform under the contract and Dela Cruz erred in deciding otherwise.

He said Dela Cruz erred in determining that the failure to notify DPL of the pandemic was a material breach of the provisions of Article 11 because DPL obviously had actual notice of the pandemic.

Thompson said Dela Cruz also erred in finding that the Rota Resort has been abandoned since July 2022 because the lease is "ambiguous" as to what constitutes abandonment.

The lawyer said Rota Resort is disappointed that Dela Cruz's 23-page decision fails to address any of Rota Resort's arguments regarding lease agreement or the continuing desire of Cho to invest on Rota.

"Indeed, the [Administrative Hearing Office] adopted the Office of the Attorney General's proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law almost verbatim," Thompson said.

He said as set forth in Rota Resort's 22-page argument to AHO, Cho has worked with DPL for over 10 years and demonstrated his commitment to improving the property and to building a successful and prosperous business.

Thompson said Cho continued to pay his 70-person staff and successfully maintained the resort for 28 months into the pandemic.

"Mr. Choi maintains a vision for Rota as a world-class destination. He has not abandoned the Rota Resort or the people of Rota in any normal sense of the word," he said.

Until DPL issued the termination letter dated March 8, 2023, DPL never even informed Cho that it had a "substantially different" interpretation of the land lease agreement and the force majeure clause, Thompson said.

Santos, as then acting DPL secretary, executed the DPL notice of termination and notice of violations on March 8, 2023.

Prior to the pandemic, Rota Resort paid its rent on time and had no problems with DPL.

Thompson said by letter to DPL dated May 22, 2020, Rota Resort indicated that, as a result of COVID-19, it was functionally closed—in the sense that it had no meaningful number of customers at the time—due to the lack of tourists.

He said Rota Resort missed its first rental payment to DPL in the quarter beginning July 2020.

Thompson said that, according to Cho, the resort continued to employ its 70 employees for two and a half years the pandemic started and lost approximately $100,000 a month.

He said Rota Resort could not pay its rent with a loan it received in May 2020 because the loan came with a condition that its employees had to be paid first.

The lawyer noted that the Rota Office of DPL's July 2022 inspection report indicates that the resort was closed as a result of the pandemic and a "total lack of tourists" but noted that the hotel was "pretty well-maintained" at the time.

Thompson said approximately 16 months prior to DPL's July 2022 inspection report, in December 2020, the Rota District Office of DPL issued the resort a notice of violations for failing to pay rent, breaching other terms of the lease, and alleging abandoning the premises.

He said Cho referred this letter indicating "malicious intent against him" to his then-lawyer, Robert T. Torres. Thompson said Torres responded promptly and raised the applicability of the force majeure clause due to the pandemic.

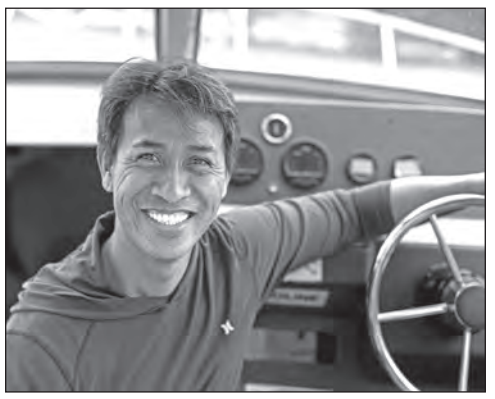
He said DPL, however, never responded to Torres' letter and only addressed the issues when it terminated the lease more than two years later, on March 8, 2023.

Thompson said Rota Resort employed 70 people prior to the pandemic, including 25% to 30% local employees. He said Cho invested close to $50 million in the Rota Resort but has mostly lost money on it.

Thompson said Cho intentionally avoided direct communications with DPL after his lawyer agreed to handle the notice of violations, to avoid making any mistakes with respect to the legal process.

"Mr. Cho believes that tourists will come back to Rota eventually, and plans to renovate it, if DPL does not terminate his lease. He further plans to market the Rota Resort very aggressively," Thompson said.

Presenters to take MTEC Tourism Summit 2024 to 'Greener Spaces'



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

FishGuyz owner and operator Sidney Takahashi will be one of the presenters at this year's Marianas Tourism Education Council Tourism Summit.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Northern Marianas College's Dr. Willson Gaul will be one of the presenters at this year's Marianas Tourism Education Council Tourism Summit.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Run Saipan president Edward S. Dela Cruz Jr. will be one of the presenters at this year's Marianas Tourism Education Council Tourism Summit.

In line with the theme "Green Spaces, Memorable Places/ Kåmpun Betdi, Kåmpun Rikuetdu/Llingil Leyil Walúwal," presenters at this year's Marianas Tourism Education Council Tourism Summit on Friday, Jan. 19, will be taking their message outdoors.

The annual summit expects to gather 300 members and chaperones of school MY WAVE—Marianas Youth Welcome All Visitors Enthusiastically—Clubs to iconic nature spots in Saipan, where several guest speakers will share about various eco-tourism topics.

An avid Star Wars fan, Edward S. Dela Cruz Jr. is the founder and president of Run Saipan, the premier running club in the Marianas dedicated to improving cardiovascular health at all levels. Run Saipan offers a variety of programs and events to help runners of all levels achieve their goals. Under his leadership, as well as his example of a seven-year running streak, Dela Cruz has inspired hundreds of others in the Northern Marianas to run and live healthier lifestyles.

Sydney Takahashi (PADI MSDT), the owner and operator of FishGuyz, has been a certified diver since 1997 and a PADI instructor since 1999. Born in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia, and raised on Saipan, Takahashi is an avid adventurer and athlete. He has worked as a dive instructor on Saipan and Hawaii, and has been diving in the CNMI, Palau, Yap, Chuuk, Japan, Hawaii, and the Philippines. Takahashi started Saipan Divers in 2009, then transitioned to Minimax Scuba in 2012, and opened FishGuyz Scuba & Charter after years of planning, saving, and acquiring experience. Takahashi also has his United States Coast Guard boat captain license, one of the few on Saipan to be both a USCG captain and a PADI instructor.

Dr. Willson Gaul has been teaching biology at Northern Marianas College since 2021, after completing a PhD in the School of Biology and Environmental Science at University College Dublin in Ireland. Before studying in Ireland, Gaul received a MS in Environmental Science and Policy from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Gaul and his students at Northern Marianas College have an active research program studying the songs and behaviors of Mariana Fruit Doves and other birds in the CNMI. The summit aims to inspire students with information and activities focused on the Marianas' primary economic driver, tourism. This year's summit will focus on the importance of trees, forests, and other natural green spaces, particularly with the desire of today's traveler for environmental conservation and physical, mental, and spiritual rejuvenation.

"As we help our students better understand and appreciate the natural beauty of our islands, it is great that we have a diverse set of speakers who will link that natural beauty to other aspects of our tourism industry that make our islands truly memorable," said summit committee chair and MTEC board member Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero, president of Northern Marianas College.

The summit will also feature educational exhibits by American Memorial Park; Div. of Fish & Wildlife Aquatic Education Program, Sea Turtle Conservation Program, and Fisheries Conservation & Management; Dept. of Land & Natural Resources enforcement officers; Marianas Visitors Authority; Northern Marianas College; Micronesian Islands Nature Alliance; Northern Marianas Museum of History & Culture; Northern Marianas Technical Institute; National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration; and U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

The event will culminate with a tree-planting activity at the Sugar King Park—in cooperation with the Saipan Mayor's Office—and Garapan Central Park, where lunch will be served.

MTEC's outreach activities this school year are supported by the Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands and the MVA.

For more information on MTEC or starting a school MY WAVE club, contact MVA Community Projects Specialist Jack Aranda at jaranda@mymarianas.com or tel. no. (670) 664-3200/1. ***(MTEC)***

Red Cross volunteers assist fire victims

American Red Cross-NMI Chapter volunteers responded to a structure fire in Garapan last Sunday and assisted a total of 10 people who were displaced as a result of the fire.

Red Cross volunteer responders Jack Amirez, Luis Crisostomo Jr., Mae Angui, Alvin Borja, and Anneli Arcega were dispatched to the scene and met with the affected residents.

After assessing the damage and interviewing the clients, volunteers were able to assist displaced clients with emergency financial assistance for food and shelter. Additionally, clients were provided with clean up kits complete with mops, bleach, and other cleaning supplies. In total, volunteers were able to assist ten individuals from the 5 units affected.

American Red Cross Executive director John Hirsh stated that "Because these disasters can happen anytime, anywhere, please help stay safe by testing your smoke alarms each month and practicing your home fire escape plan until everyone in your household can escape in two minutes or less."

What can people do?

People can visit redcross.org/homefires to find out more about how to protect themselves and their loved homes from fire. They can become a Red Cross volunteer by contacting the local chapter office at (670) 234-3459 or by visiting our website at www.redcross.org/nmi. ***(PR)***

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

American Red Cross-NMI Chapter volunteers were dispatched to the scene of a fire in Garapan and met with the affected residents last Sunday.

Red Cross Walkathon on April 20

The American Red Cross-NMI Chapter is excited to announce that this year's Walkathon will take place on Saturday, April 20.

The event will be held on Saipan, Rota, and Tinian and include fun for the whole family, prizes, games, T-shirts, and a community fair.

This important event helps raise funds that enable the NMI chapter volunteers to provide critical assistance and programs to everyone in the Commonwealth.

For more information about the Walkathon or the Red Cross, call (670) 234-3459. ***(PR)***

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

SHERRYL G. DELA CRUZ, Petitioner, vs. RANEL H. DELA CRUZ, Respondent,

FCD-DI CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0495

SUMMONS FOR PUBLICATION

TO THE ABOVE NAME RESPONDENT:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Petitioner whose address is P.O. Box 7777 SVRB, Saipan, MP 96950, as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.

Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at P.O. Box 500307 Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this summons, judgement by default may be taken against you for relief in the complaint.

Dated this 22nd day of December 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Li Fen Lu Delos Reyes (Name of Mother/Father), A.P.L.DLR. (Name(s) of Child(ren)) Plaintiffs, vs. Patrick Pinaula Delos Reyes (Name of the Mother/Father) Defendant

FCD PA CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0491

SUMMONS FOR FOR PUBLICATION

TO THE ABOVE-NAMED DEFENDANT:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the Court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Plaintiff whose address is P.O. Box 7350 SVRB, Saipan MP 96950 as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.

Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this Summons, Judgement by Default may be taken against you for relief in the Complaint.

Dated this 22nd day of December, 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

In Re the Matter of the Petition To Correct: Alvin A. Alcasid, Petitioner(s)

FCD CIVIL ACTION NO. 24-0006

NOTICE OF HEARING

Notice is hereby given that the above-entitled matter is set for a hearing on March 11, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. in Courtroom 217A, before Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio.

Dated this 12 day of January, 2024.

Patrick Diaz
Clerk of Court
By: Deputy Clerk of Court

Learn content monetization, film funding strategies with SBDC

The CNMI Small Business Development Center Network at Northern Marianas College is thrilled to announce a two-day workshop featuring the multifaceted entrepreneur, business advisor, filmmaker, and community organizer from Guam, Myracle Mugol. The event is set to take place at the American Memorial Park's Amphitheater in Garapan, Saipan, on Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, and Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024.

The first workshop, titled "Monetizing Content Creation," is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, from 5:30pm to 7:30pm. Mugol, with her extensive background as a business advisor for the Pacific Islands SBDC Network and a program coordinator for the Bank of Guam Women in Business Program, will share invaluable insights. Attendees will gain knowledge on establishing a robust business plan, understanding local and federal compliance requirements for growth, crafting relatable social media content, and implementing effective monetization strategies for maximum profits. Additionally, the workshop will feature a guest appearance from the renowned social media content creator group, PalmTrio670.

Mugol

The second workshop, "Unleashing the Reel: Navigating Funding Opportunities for Independent Filmmakers," is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, from 1:30pm to 3:30pm. Mugol, who wears multiple hats as an entrepreneur and filmmaker, will provide an introduction to independent filmmaking. The session will demystify grant writing, unveil film development opportunities, and showcase funding opportunities with the Northern Marianas Humanities Council.

"We are honored to collaborate with Myracle Mugol to bring these insightful workshops to our community. Myracle's expertise spans various domains, making these sessions valuable for both aspiring and established entrepreneurs, content creators, and filmmakers," said Nadine Deleon Guerrero, CNMI SBDC Network director.

The workshops are open to the public, and attendees are encouraged to register in advance to secure their spot. Interested individuals can register below:

■ Monetizing Content Creation
Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, 5:30pm-7:30pm at the American Memorial Park Amphitheater

Registration Link: https://marianas.ecenterdirect.com/events/1019137

■ Unleashing the Reel: Navigating Funding Opportunities for Independent Filmmakers

Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, 1:30pm-3:30pm at. the American Memorial Park Amphitheater

Registration Link: https://marianas.ecenterdirect.com/events/1019138

Don't miss this unique opportunity to learn from Myracle Mugol and gain valuable insights that can propel your business or creative endeavors to new heights. Join us for two days of inspiration, knowledge-sharing, and networking.

The CNMI SBDC Network promotes a business-friendly economic infrastructure in the community, builds entrepreneurial capacity and financial literacy within that community, and provides current and nascent small businesses with the technical assistance, counseling, training, and support they need to innovate, adapt, and grow.

The CNMI Small Business Development Center Network (comprises the CNMI SBDC lead center located on Saipan, the Rota SBDC, and Tinian SBDC. ***(PR)***

UOG launches new degree track in forensic chemistry

A new pathway to the highly employable career field of forensic chemistry is now available to students at the University of Guam. The College of Natural & Applied Sciences has launched a forensic chemistry track, or concentration, under its Bachelor of Science in Chemistry Program, and students can start declaring it as their major in the Fañomnåkan 2024 semester that started Jan. 17.

UOG

Associate professor of Chemistry Dr. Bulan Wu inputs a substance into a gas chromatograph mass spectrometer for separation and identification of its chemical elements. The instrument is a new addition to UOG's chemistry instrumentation lab.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that employment of forensic science technicians is projected to grow 13% over the next 10 years with 2,600 job openings projected each year. The median annual wage for forensic scientists is 37%, or about $17,000 higher than other occupations.

On average, 47 UOG students declare chemistry as their major each academic year. Dr. Maika Vuki, Division of Natural Sciences Chair, anticipates the forensic track will bring more students to the chemistry major since it is applied chemistry—meaning it teaches the use of chemistry to solve practical problems.

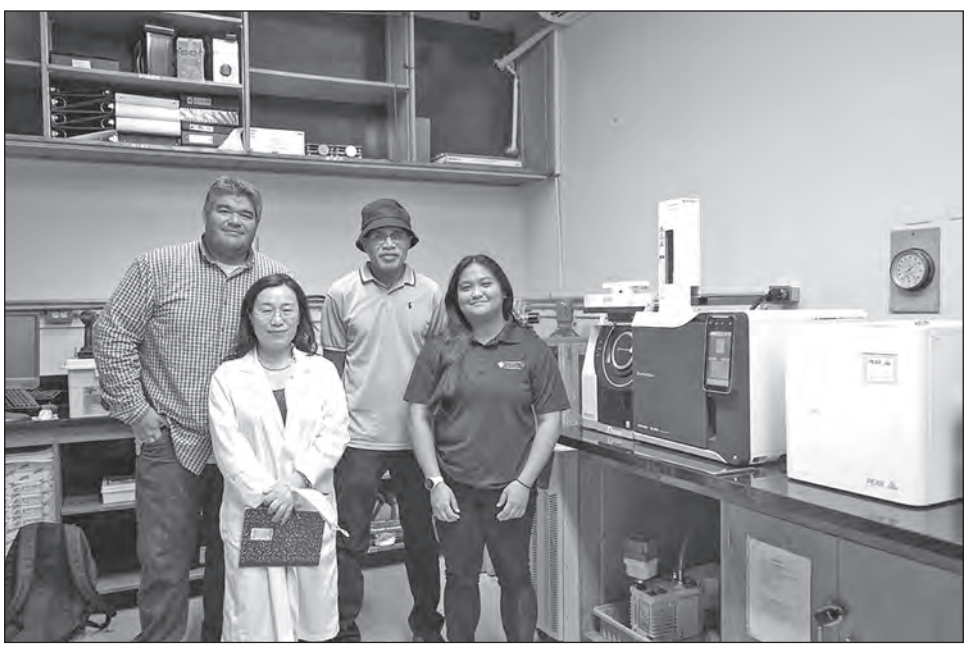
Vuki said incoming students are familiar with and excited about forensic science due to the popularity of "CSI" and other crime investigation TV shows.

The track will prepare students for careers as forensic chemists in local or state crime laboratories. They could also work as analytical chemists, conducting routine chemical analyses in commercial, state, or medical laboratories, or as a scientific officer in environmental or medical applications. Vuki said graduates can also use their degree to teach at the high school and community college level.

Some of UOG's chemistry graduates now work in Guam crime labs. Other graduates are working in state laboratories in the U.S. mainland.

Students who declare a forensic chemistry track will be required to complete 87 credit hours covering chemistry, biology, math, physics, and law courses, plus a required internship in a forensic lab. They will get to work directly with local forensic experts as well as utilize one of the college's newest instruments—a gas chromatograph mass spectrometer, or GC-MS, which separates and identifies complex chemical mixtures.

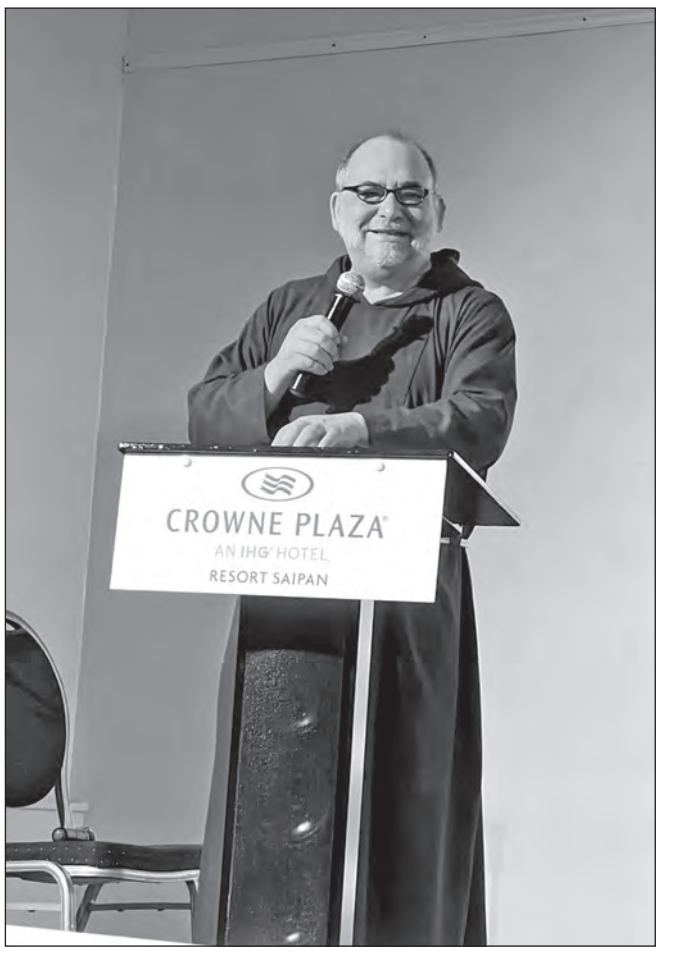
Students interested in the forensic chemistry track should have a strong background in general chemistry and college Algebra and a passion for working in a chemistry lab. Those who are interested can contact Dr. Maika Vuki at (671) 735-2781 or vukim@triton.uog.edu. ***(UOG)***


UOG

From left, University of Guam chemistry faculty Dr. John Limtiaco, Dr. Bulan Wu, Dr. Maika Vuki, and laboratory supervisor and lead technician Ezra Cervera in the Chemistry Teaching & Instrumentation Lab.

'The Little Prince' translated in the CHamoru language

TIYAN, Guam—*The Little Prince*, a classic children's book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, has been translated into the CHamoru language by Påle' Eric Forbes, OFM Capuchin. Through a grant from the Jean-Marc Probst Foundation—with the original text translated by Påle' Eric Forbes—copies of the CHamoru language edition of *I Dikkiki' na Prinsipi* (*The Little Prince*) will be presented during the press conference to the Guam Department of Education today, Jan. 18, 2024, 11:30am at the GDOE Gallery conference room.



MARK RABAGO

Påle' Eric Forbes has translated *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry into the CHamoru language.

One of the most beloved books in the world is *The Little Prince*, written by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. He was a French writer and aviator who published this book in English and French in the United States in 1943. The book has sold more than 140 million copies worldwide and has been translated into over 569 languages and dialects, making it the second most translated book ever. The book narrates the adventures of a young prince who explores the cosmos and discovers valuable insights about life, love and friendship.

Påle' Eric Forbes, OFM Cap., is the former Capuchin superior for Guam and Hawaii, and a prolific author in CHamoru and English. He stated, "I am delighted to have been able to not only translate *The Little Prince*, but to bring *I Dikkiki na Prinsipi* to the children of Guam." The grant also supported the preparation for printing and publication by Glimpses Media.

Superintendent Swanson saluted Påle' Forbes for his work in keeping the CHamoru language alive by translating *The Little Prince* book. "This book is a precious resource for our schools to motivate, assist, and enrich the CHamoru language learning for the young generation and the adults who want to learn the language," he added.

Jimmy Teria, administrator of the CHamoru Studies and Special Projects Division of GDOE stated, "*Sen Dangkolo na Si Yu'os Ma'åse* (Thank you very much) Påle' Forbes, for translating and donating the books to our public schools. This book is a valuable addition to our CHamoru language literacy materials; not only because of the story and lessons imparted through the Little Prince's journey, but through reading and comprehension we build up our vocabulary and enrich our language capacity"

For more information, contact (671) 300-1677 or email at mtreyes@gdoe.net. ***(PR)***

$100M will be left for Native Hawaiian causes

AP

Native Hawaiian heiress Abigail Kawānanakoa poses outside a Honolulu courthouse on Oct. 25, 2019.

HONOLULU (AP)—In life, Abigail Kawānanakoa embodied the complexities of Hawaii: Many considered her a princess—a descendant of the royal family that once ruled the islands.

But she was also the great-granddaughter of a sugar baron and inherited vast wealth thanks to Westerners who upended traditional ways of life through the introduction of private property and the diversion of water for industrial plantations.

Now, more than a year after her death at age 96 and the bitter battles over her fortune in the twilight of her life, her estate has been settled. And recently finalized court documents show that after doling out tens of millions to various people—including former housekeepers, other longtime employees and her wife—there will be at least $100 million left to support Native Hawaiian causes.

Kawānanakoa cared deeply about advancing Hawaiian culture, and resolving her estate is meaningful to Hawaiians because it is the last of what's known as "alii," or royal, trusts, which were set up by royalty to benefit Native Hawaiians, said Dr. Naleen Naupaka Andrade, executive vice president of Native Hawaiian health for The Queen's Health System. The health system was created from a trust established by Queen Emma in 1859.

"Quite frankly, the needs of Hawaiians in education, in social welfare, in housing, in health far exceed the capacity of these trusts," she said. "They augment what federal and state dollars should be doing for Hawaii's Indigenous peoples."

Many have been watching where the money ends up because of concerns about the fate of the foundation Kawānanakoa set up to benefit Hawaiians. Kawānanakoa's trust will perpetuate Native Hawaiian culture and language, Andrade said.

According to documents in the probate case for her estate, $40 million will go to her wife. Settlements have also been reached with about a dozen other people who had claims, including someone described in court documents as her "hanai" son, referring to an informal adoption in Hawaiian culture.

Legal wrangling over Kawānanakoa's trust, which now has a value of at least $250 million, began in 2017 after she suffered a stroke. She disputed claims that she was impaired, and married Veronica Gail Worth, her partner of 20 years, who later changed her name to Veronica Gail Kawānanakoa.

In 2020, a judge ruled that Abigail Kawānanakoa was, in fact, impaired, and thus unable to manage her property and business affairs. The estate has been overseen by a trustee.

She inherited her wealth as the great-granddaughter of James Campbell, an Irish businessman who made his fortune as a sugar plantation owner and one of Hawaii's largest landowners. She held no formal title but was a living reminder of Hawaii's monarchy and a symbol of Hawaiian national identity that endured after the kingdom was overthrown by American businessmen in 1893.

Over the years, some insisted Kawānanakoa was held up as royalty only because of her wealth. They disputed her princess claim, saying that had the monarchy survived, a cousin would be in line to be the ruler, not her.

She put her money toward various causes, including scholarships, medical bills and funerals for Native Hawaiians. She supported protests against a giant telescope because of its proposed placement on Mauna Kea, a sacred mountain in Hawaiian culture; donated items owned by King Kalākaua and Queen Kapiʻolani for public display, including a 14-carat diamond from the king's pinky ring; and maintained ʻIolani Palace—America's only royal residence, where the Hawaiian monarchy dwelled, and which now serves mostly as a museum.

"Historically significant items" belonging to Kawānanakoa will be delivered to the palace, said a statement issued by trustee Jim Wright on behalf of her foundation.

Her trust has been supporting causes dear to her, including programming at the palace such as night tours and cultural dinners, and paying for students at Hawaiian-focused schools to visit cultural sites and experience symphony performances in Hawaiian, Wright said.

After Internal Revenue Service clearance, the foundation will receive the leftover money, which Wright estimated to be at least $100 million, to fund similar efforts.

Kauikeolani Nani'ole, an educator at Hālau Kū Māna Public Charter School in Honolulu, said her school recently received money from the trust for busing to community events.

"In those small ways, they make big impacts for schools like us," she said.

She called Kawānanakoa an "unsung alii" because she often donated to causes and people anonymously.

According to documents establishing her foundation in 2001, Kawānanakoa wanted it to "maintain, support, preserve and foster the traditional Hawaiian culture in existence prior to 1778"—the year the first European explorer, Capt. James Cook, reached the islands. That includes Hawaiian music, religion, language and art.

Andrade recently visited Kawānanakoa's crypt at Mauna ʻAla, also known as the Royal Mausoleum State Monument, which is the burial place of Hawaiian royalty. She laid an offering of maile leaves entwined with white ginger—a flower Kawānanakoa loved.

"All of the pilikia—all of the trouble—that occurred in the last several years after she became ill: What was lost in all that was her love of her people," Andrade said. "Her deep, deep love and the thoughtfulness she had, and the foresight she had before she became ill about wanting to leave a legacy for her people that could make a difference."

Wildfire prevention and helping Maui recover from flames top agenda for Hawaii lawmakers

AP

This photo taken on Friday, Jan. 12, 2024 shows the Hawaii State Capitol in Honolulu. Fighting and preventing wildfires and helping the island of Maui recover from August's flames are at the top of the agenda as Hawaii lawmakers prepare to open a new session of the Legislature on Jan. 17, 2024.

HONOLULU (AP)—Hawaii lawmakers are due to convene this week for the first time since the burning of historic Lahaina awakened the state to the deadly and costly threat posed by wildfires in an age of climate change.

The tragedy refocused the attention of lawmakers. Now, fighting and preventing wildfires and helping the island of Maui recover from the flames top the agenda as Hawaii's Legislature returns for a new session this week.

"It really kicked us into gear in a different way," said state Rep. Nadine Nakamura, the House majority leader and a Democrat.

The Aug. 8 blaze killed 100 people, destroyed more than 2,000 buildings and displaced 12,000 people. Experts estimate it will cost $5.5 billion to replace the structures exposed to the fire.

Investigators are still studying how the fire began. Heavy winds whipped up by a powerful hurricane passing south of Hawaii helped the flames spread quickly, as did drought and non-native fire-prone grasses.

Another fire in early August burned about 20 homes in Kula, a town on the slopes of Haleakala volcano.

House Democrats will look at wildfire prevention needs statewide and develop an understanding of what the state Department of Land and Natural Resources needs in order to do a better job, Nakamura said.

A House wildfire prevention working group formed after the fire recommended a range of new measures, including a public awareness campaign to prevent fires from starting and tax or insurance incentives for wildfire-safe structures. The working group recommended that the state maintain firefighting aircraft and other equipment specifically to fight wildfires.

The Senate majority said in a news release it was committed to forming a fire risk task force and seeking permanent funding for the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization, which is a hub for wildfire prevention and mitigation.

Democrats have overwhelming majorities in both chambers, controlling 44 out of 50 seats in the House (one seat is vacant) and 23 out of 25 seats in the Senate.

Gov. Josh Green, a Democrat, in December asked lawmakers to appropriate $425 million for the Maui cleanup and emergency housing, and millions more to reduce statewide wildfire risk.

Colin Moore, a University of Hawaii political science professor, said it was clear after Lahaina that state agencies need more money to manage forests and other natural resources. That could help revive a proposal considered last year to charge visitors for a yearlong pass to visit state parks and trails.

The bill would be popular during an election year, Moore said.

"That is the sort of thing legislators will want to advertise in their reelection campaigns," he said.

Nakamura said the Maui fires exacerbated a problem that existed long before: the proliferation of vacation rentals around the state.

Thousands of Lahaina residents who lost their homes in the fire are still living in hotels five months after the blaze because there is not enough housing for them, even though tourists are renting condos in their midst. Many wildfire evacuees have left Maui because they can't find a place to live.

Lawmakers could revisit legislation that has failed before that would give counties the authority to phase out short-term rentals, Nakamura said.

A University of Hawaii analysis estimates vacation rentals account for 15% of Maui's housing stock. In Lahaina, the ratio is 40%.

Moore expects lawmakers to continue to try to address one of Hawaii's most persistent challenges: the statewide housing shortage and high cost of housing that is fueling an exodus of Native Hawaiians and other local-born residents from the state. But any measures would likely be "reforms on the margins" instead of dramatic overhauls, he said.

"I think you're going to see more of what we've seen in the past, which is trying to figure out what is the right mix of regulatory reforms and subsidies and rental assistance," Moore said.

He said people needing affordable housing the most are a large, unorganized group that has little pull at the Legislature. Groups who care passionately about regulations restricting or slowing housing construction—for example, rules governing historic preservation or environmental regulation—are more readily able to mobilize and advocate, he said.

Nakamura said there will be a push for zoning to allow more housing on individual lots and for putting money into funds that subsidize affordable housing development.

There is widespread understanding that Hawaii needs more shelter for residents, Nakamura said, relaying how she has talked to business leaders and people in the tourism and health care industries who say their workers need housing.

"If they can't find an affordable rental and use their skills in Hawaii, then we all lose out," she said.

Opinion

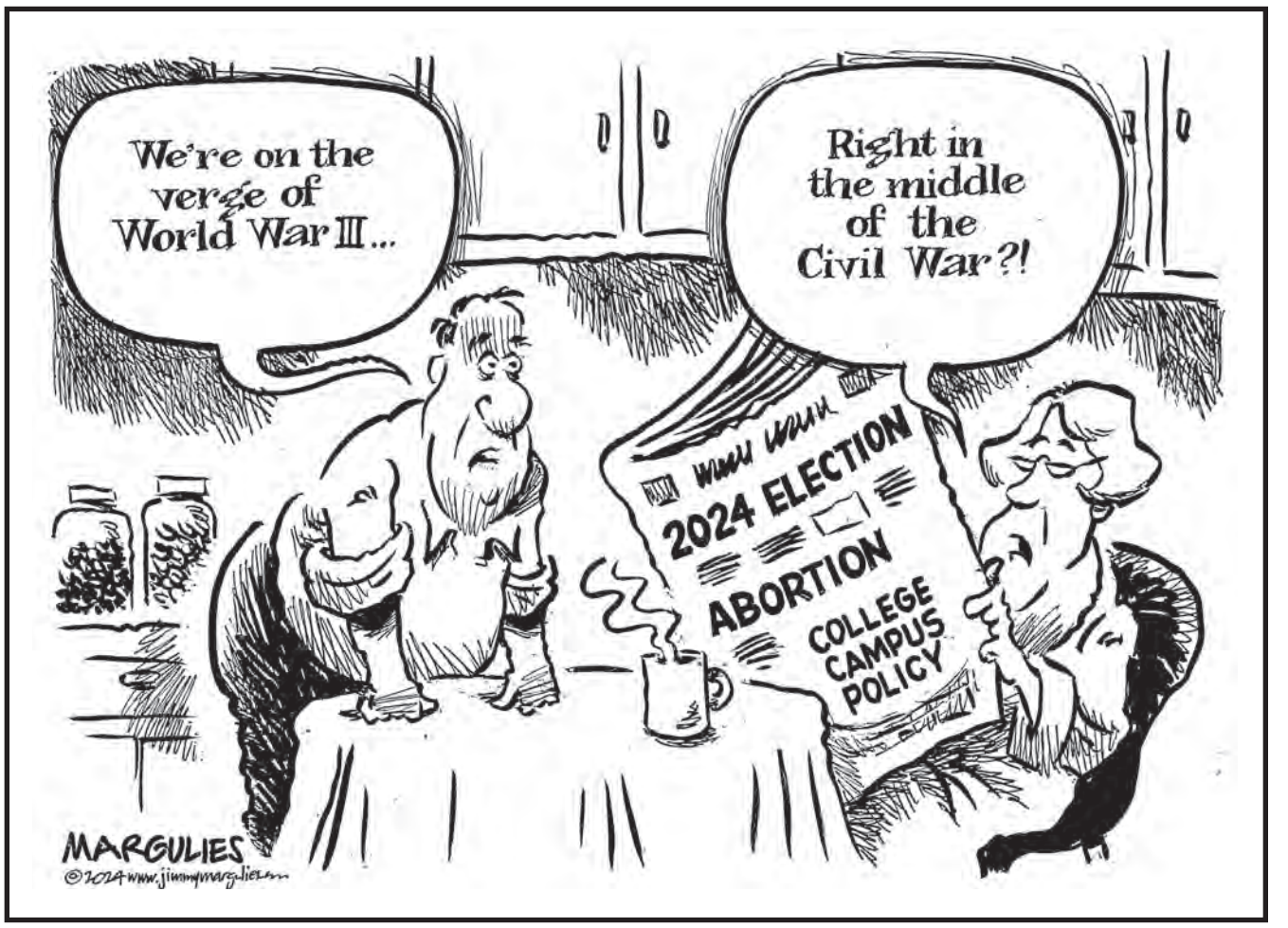
Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 13

Published daily at 2/F JP Center,
Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI
Mailing Address: PMB 34, Box 10001, Saipan, MP, 96950

Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association



EDITORIAL

Missouri's lifetime food-stamp ban for drug felons is cruel and counterproductive

As Missouri lawmakers embark on yet another legislative session sure to be defined by right-wing extremism and entrenched partisanship, positive exception has arisen regarding, of all things, public assistance: A bipartisan proposal would finally end a cruel and counterproductive lifetime ban on food stamp eligibility for people with felony drug convictions in their past.

Technically, the state modified that ban a decade ago, but under such onerous restrictions that it effectively still prevents almost anyone with a felony drug record from accessing the federal-state Supplemental Nutrition Food Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps.

That banishment amounts to continuing punishment for people who have already paid their debt to society. Those unpersuaded by that factor should consider that it also significantly increases the chances of recidivism.

In 1996, the federal government banned anyone with any kind of felony drug conviction from receiving SNAP benefits, ever. The idea was to prevent federal money from indirectly funding the illicit drug trade.

But for released felons, public assistance is often crucial to successfully rejoining society and avoiding a return to crime and prison. A 2017 Harvard Law study found that access to SNAP and related benefits for ex-inmates reduced recidivism by 10% during the first year out of prison. Numerous other studies confirm the effect.

The short-sighted federal ban's saving grace was that it allowed states to opt out. Most did. Today, only South Carolina still fully enforces the lifetime ban on SNAP benefits for drug felons. A majority of states, including Illinois, have nixed the ban completely.

But almost as many states have only modified the ban, putting specific restrictions in place for drug felons seeking benefits.

Under modified Missouri restrictions approved in 2014, SNAP benefits are available to drug felons only if they have had no more than a single felony conviction for drug possession—and then they are required to undergo drug testing and treatment. It is among the nation's most stringent set of restrictions, one critics say is effectively a ban.

For families attempting to get back on their feet after a felony conviction, these requirements add to the already-daunting roadblocks on the route to employment and self-sufficiency that is crucial to prevent recidivism.

As the Missouri Independent reports, the proposal to end the ban is being spearheaded by state Sens. Mary Elizabeth Coleman, R-Arnold, and Lauren Arthur, D-Kansas City.

Coleman is no one's idea of a bleeding-heart liberal—or even a moderate conservative. For example, she has sought to extend Missouri's near-total abortion ban to apply to women

See MISSOURI'S on Page 9

The US debt is now $34 trillion. Don't worry. Seriously

By CLAUDIA SAHM
Bloomberg Opinion

Claudia Sahm is the founder of Sahm Consulting and a former Federal Reserve economist. She is the creator of the Sahm rule, a recession indicator.

U.S. federal government debt ended 2023 at a record $34 trillion. The worries are bipartisan, with both Republicans and Democrats hearing about out-of-control borrowing from their constituents. In fact, almost six in 10 Americans say reducing it should be a top priority, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center. So, it's not a surprise that Congress is moving closer to passing a budget for fiscal year 2024 that would cap spending at $1.59 trillion which is a bit less than the $1.7 trillion in fiscal 2023.

But many of reasons why lawmakers and voters have concerns about the size of the nation's debt—concerns that have been around for many decades—are misguided and undermine a constructive conversation about the priorities for the country. Debt is neither inherently good nor bad. As such, the question is not what's the right level of borrowing, but rather what's the economic return on the borrowing or the societal goals it advances.

Take the child tax credit. When the Biden administration increased borrowing to expand the deduction to as much as $3,600 per child from its previous amount of $2,000, the child poverty rate tumbled to as low as around 5% in 2021 from almost 13% in 2019, making it easier for families to provide the basics, such as food, clothing and school supplies. When the program expired at the end of 2021, the rate shot up to 12.6%.

Or consider the tens of billions of dollars in grants and contracts the government handed out help fund the development of mRNA technology that was used in the COVID-19 vaccines. The return on that investment to society is incalculable. And would the economy have been so surprisingly strong the past few years without the extra borrowing, avoiding a damaging recession that would have thrown millions out of work?

For an example of deficit spending that might be viewed as bad, research suggests that tax breaks for companies, which decrease tax revenue and thereby increase the budget deficit, may exacerbate income inequality rather than the intended outcome of encouraging companies to boost capital spending to strengthen their businesses and the economy.

Regardless, the amount of U.S. debt must be put in context. Yes, $34 trillion is big number, but $142 trillion is even bigger and much more important because it represents the total wealth of Americans—a massive resource that helps fund government debt and deficits.

The pessimists will counter by pointing to the amount of interest the government is paying to service its debt. In fiscal 2023 that ended Sept. 30, the figure was also a record - $882.6 billion, to be exact. Again, context matters. Although the amount has doubled since 2016, it was a manageable 3.4% of gross domestic product, less than the 4.3% level of the late 1990s when the government was running budget surpluses instead of deficits like now, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Sure enough, whenever there's a debate about government borrowing, it's inevitably put in the context of the financial constraints faced by households. But the correct context for how the federal government makes decisions about debt is not the same as how households make decisions about debt. Stephanie Kelton, professor of economics at Stony Brook University, rightly argues that this is one of the many " myths" embedded in the discussion about the federal debt.

The government can easily service its debt because of its unlimited taxing authority and ability to issue more U.S. Treasury securities to repay maturing securities. Conversely, households can't just increase their incomes to a desired level at will.

Rather than the level of borrowing, political gamesmanship over the federal debt is a far greater risk to the economy. The United States has earned what's known as an " exorbitant privilege" in the post-World War II era, meaning that there is always demand from investors around the world for U.S. Treasuries in good times and bad. That privilege was earned by the U.S. promoting a dynamic economy, adhering to the rule of law and being a stable democracy. As such, the dollar accounts for around 60% of global foreign-exchange reserves, three times that of the No. 2 reserve currency, the euro.

More important than reducing the debt or balancing the budget would be efforts by lawmakers to protect the U.S.'s exorbitant privilege. Those in Congress creating high drama over the nation's borrowing and budgets have caused some to question whether Treasuries are really the world's safest assets. In stripping the U.S. of its AAA credit ratings, both S&P Global Ratings and Fitch Ratings cited concern about rising political dysfunction following several debt-ceiling standoffs.

Politics is the real threat, not the level of borrowing. A country that prioritizes the size of the federal debt has bad priorities.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Why are companies refusing to fully embrace flexible work?

By TARA SCHWEGLER
Chicago Tribune

Tara Schwegler is a senior lecturer at the University of Texas at San Antonio and previously taught at the University of Chicago.

On a September day in 1994, 32,000 AT&T employees telecommuted from home in an alternative work experiment widely heralded as the wave of the future. Almost 30 years later, in June, AT&T ordered 60,000 managers working remotely to return to the office, forcing 9,000 of them who do not live within commuting distance of AT&T's nine regional offices to relocate or resign.

Flexible work can make employees happier and more productive. But seemingly every time it is tried, employers do a rapid about-face and return to business as usual. The cycle is repeating itself, this time in the recent wave of return-to-office directives, or RTO. Although most employers cite concerns over productivity, there is a deeper reason for the continued refusal to embrace alternative work.

Americans are culturally hard-wired to define work as incompatible with flexibility. If employees are happy and relaxed, they must not really be working. Any attempts to transform the workplace crash into this harsh reality.

> A recent report by Moody's found that U.S. gross domestic product could grow by $1 trillion over the next decade if women's workforce participation reached levels in other developed economies. Imagine what the figure would be if we unlocked the potential of the many different employees who want to work but require flexibility.

I am an anthropologist who studies the cultural assumptions that shape how humans think about work. Americans define work as a form of virtuous sacrifice, which makes discomfort a cultural prerequisite for work. Long commutes, unforgiving hours and 24/7 availability are not the unfortunate side effects of the modern workplace. They are the prerequisites of work in America.

Office misery is a dominant motif in American pop culture. Everyone from Mr. Incredible to the hapless intern in "The Devil Wears Prada" is saddled with the same combination of mind-numbing tasks, dastardly office politics and impossible deadlines because, well, that's what work is. We chastise one another with the adage, "If it was fun, it wouldn't be called work," and anyone who simply meets, rather than exceeds, their job requirements is deemed a "quiet quitter."

The most visible manifestation of this cultural assumption is the tendency to associate flexibility with laziness. Tech leader Elon Musk didn't leave room for doubt when he declared that remote workers "should pretend to work somewhere else," but most CEOs consistently imply that individuals who seek flexibility are doing so to dodge work. Long before COVID-19, employees who took advantage of flexible work policies were viewed as not committed to their work, even if their performance remained high. Perceived laziness strikes a deep chord in a nation defined by the Protestant work ethic, and it creates a blind spot in the way that Americans value types of work.

Yet, employees have myriad reasons for needing flexibility. Working parents who ask for flexible hours so they can pick up their children at school are not lazy. Dual-earner couples who struggle to find jobs in the same geographic location are not lazy. Adult children caring for elderly parents across the country are not lazy. People of color who want to avoid constant microaggressions are not lazy. They are trying to do their jobs despite the many obstacles in their path. They are 21st century employees with 21st century needs working according to early 20th century norms.

And research backs this up. The COVID-19 pandemic was a real-life experiment in flexible work, and the results were overwhelmingly positive. Research shows that flexible work arrangements increase employee satisfaction, improve work-life balance, support diversity and boost labor force participation of working parents with minimal impact on productivity. Depending on the type of work, they can also increase productivity. Nevertheless, butts in chairs is the new metric for corporate productivity. Ninety percent of companies intend to have RTO policies this year, at significant cost to the diversity, morale and vitality of the workforce.

Undoubtedly, certain professions and tasks require in-person work and set schedules. Some jobs are not amenable to remote work, but that does not mean they can't embrace other forms of flexibility. The need for in-person collaboration and career development opportunities for new employees are also legitimate concerns in remote and hybrid workplaces that must be addressed. But sweeping RTO orders that impose rigid pre-COVID-19 work styles foreclose the possibility of meaningful dialogue between employees and employers about mutually beneficial work arrangements. Many CEOs who have issued sweeping RTO edicts have outsourced flexible work to other countries. They should embrace that same ethos with their U.S. employees.

We must challenge these assumptions by embracing bold new experiments in work that go beyond the in-person versus remote debate to consider innovative new models that advance the twin goals of productivity and employee satisfaction. A revised concept of work would recognize that work-life balance is the mainstay of employee productivity. It would reward employees based on outcomes, not face time or perceived commitment to work. It would encourage employees and employers to experiment with new models of work, such as radical flexibility, which empowers teams to decide not only the location of their work but also their daily schedules (e.g., nontraditional work hours), their effort and their activities. Technology consultancy Gartner recently found that when organizations deliver radical flexibility, "the percentage of employees defined as high performers increases by 40%."

A recent report by Moody's found that U.S. gross domestic product could grow by $1 trillion over the next decade if women's workforce participation reached levels in other developed economies. Imagine what the figure would be if we unlocked the potential of the many different employees who want to work but require flexibility.

We must confront our punitive assumptions about work and embrace bold new experiments in when, where, how and how much Americans work. Otherwise, we will just repeat the AT&T cycle all over again and miss the opportunity to create a more just, productive and dynamic workplace.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Clarification on recent statements: Advocating for open dialogue and unity

In the recent exchange between Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero and myself, I feel compelled to address the misconceptions and provide clarity on the issues raised during the House of Representatives session. It's crucial to move beyond personal attacks and focus on the substance of the matters at hand.

Firstly, the discussion on the backlog of 45 bills in the Senate was not intended to cast blame but rather to seek understanding. It's essential to emphasize the importance of addressing legislative matters promptly and transparently for the benefit of our community.

I appreciate the support for House Bill 23-22, which has garnered momentum and backing from the attorney general, fellow House members, and private citizens of the CNMI community. My intention is to work collaboratively, ensuring that the bills we champion reflect the needs and aspirations of our constituents.

Let us shift our focus from personal disagreements to constructive dialogue, prioritizing the well-being of the people we serve. Together, we can navigate the legislative process with transparency, accountability, and a commitment to the betterment of the CNMI.

Rep. Marissa R. Flores
House of Representatives,
23rd Legislature

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Tinian airport name on CPA agenda

Dear Joe Ayuyu, chairman, Commonwealth Ports Authority:

It has come to the Tinian leadership's attention that the Tinian airport name is listed as a discussion item on your next Commonwealth Ports Authority meeting on Friday, Jan. 19, 2024.

As you are aware, the previous CPA board acted to change the name of the Tinian International Airport to the Francisco Manglona Borja Tinian International Airport. We are aware that this change is also reflected in the Federal Aviation Administration's Airport Operating Certificate. This action by the board was in response to and in support of the Tinian leadership's request. Prior to taking such action, the board held a public hearing on Tinian and provided the community the opportunity to comment on the proposed action. The public hearing was well attended with an overwhelming majority supporting the request of the Tinian leadership.

One of the questions that was raised at the public hearing and at the board meeting was whether the CPA board had the authority to name its facilities. The answer was "yes" from the two counsels that represented CPA.

The Tinian leadership is baffled that this matter is once again being revisited by the board. if the board has the authority to change the name of its buildings, why is this matter being revisited? The agenda denotes "legislative action" next to the agenda item. Is the board now requesting that the Legislature take action to rename a building that has already been renamed at the request of the Tinian leadership and supported overwhelmingly by the people of Tinian?

Furthermore, pursuing this route, given the political climate in the Legislature, opens this matter for debate amongst representatives who do not live in the Second Senatorial District. For your information, there was a bill that was previously introduced to rename the airport to what it is today but was held up by representatives from Saipan because of politics. Given these dynamics, CPA's autonomy, and the clear authority of the board to rename its buildings, I am concerned as to what is the impetus for this move by the board.

To be succinct, you are going against the decision of the people of Tinian. On behalf of the Tinian Legislative Delegation, I respectfully ask that you take no further action with regard to the Francisco Manglona Borja Tinian International Airport. This matter has been decided by the people of the Second Senatorial District.

Sen. Karl R. King-Nabors
Chairman, Tinian and Aguiguan Legislative Delegation
23rd Legislature

MISSOURI'S

From page 8

even when they travel outside the state, a notion that is as unconstitutional as it is Orwellian.

Yet on the food-stamp issue, Coleman argues persuasively that "access to food and access to nutrition is not something that should be punitive." Her fellow legislative Republicans should heed this nod to common sense, good governance and plain old compassion, and approve the SNAP reforms.

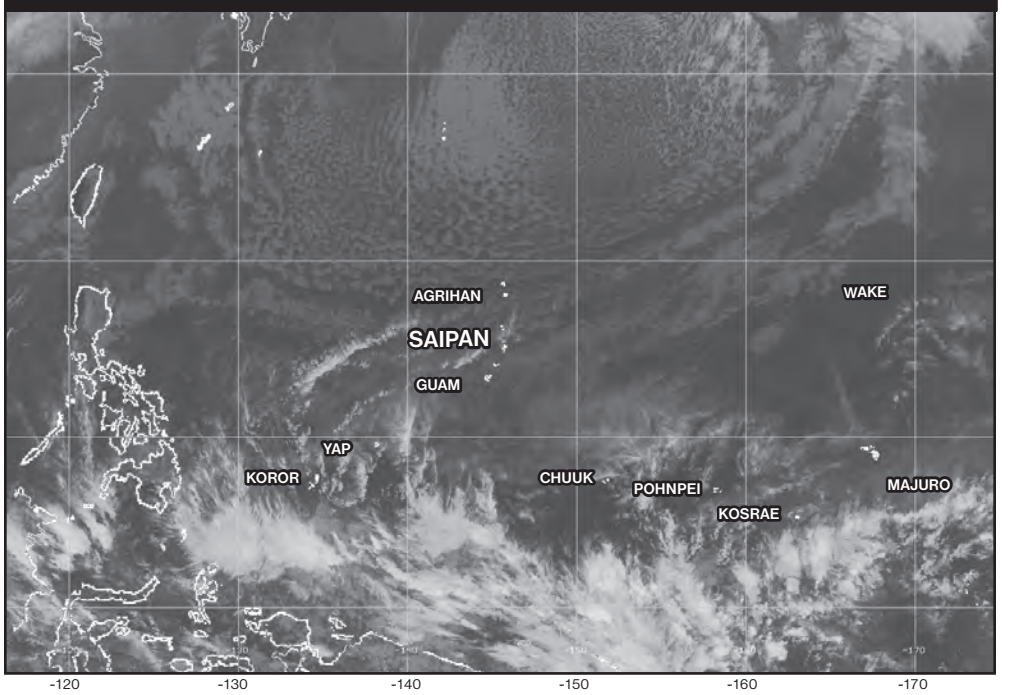
©2024 STLtoday.com

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Damaging winds likely. Northeast winds 30 to 40 mph. Mostly sunny.	Windy, becoming breezy starting Friday night. Partly cloudy. Isolated showers. East winds 20 to 30 mph.	Breezy. Partly cloudy.	Breezy. Partly cloudy.	Breezy. Partly cloudy.
86 77°	85 75°	85 75°	85 75°	85 75°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 7:48 AM WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

The high wind event is expected today, with strong to gale-force winds to arrive in a few hours. Seas are also rising, which are now at 11 feet as indicated by Tanapag buoy.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	85° / 77°
Palau	Thunderstorms	83° / 77°
Yap	Thunderstorms	84° / 77°
Chuuk	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	83° / 78°
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	83° / 79°
Majuro	Thunderstorms	84° / 80°

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	76° / 62°
Beijing	Sunny	44° / 13°
Hong Kong	Mostly Sunny	63° / 55°
Honolulu	Showers	75° / 65°
London	Mostly Cloudy	46° / 41°
Los Angeles	Sunny	79° / 52°
Manila	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 75°
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	70° / 57°
Miami	Showers	70° / 59°
New York	Partly Cloudy	44° / 28°
Osaka	Mostly Sunny	46° / 39°
Paris	Mostly Cloudy	43° / 39°
Busan	Partly Cloudy/Wind	49° / 28°
Rome	Partly Cloudy	48° / 30°
Salem	Sunny	52° / 30°
San Francisco	Sunny	68° / 53°
Seoul	Mostly Sunny	41° / 9°
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	42° / 24°
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	44° / 29°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:46 AM	6:07 PM
Friday	6:46 AM	6:08 PM
Saturday	6:47 AM	6:08 PM
Sunday	6:47 AM	6:09 PM
Monday	6:47 AM	6:09 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	11:54 AM	-	-
Friday	-	12:46 AM	12:36 PM
Saturday	-	1:42 AM	1:21 PM
Sunday	-	2:40 AM	2:08 PM
Monday	-	3:38 AM	3:00 PM

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
12:41 AM	High Tide	1.30
6:42 AM	Low Tide	0.42
1:08 PM	High Tide	1.80
8:24 PM	Low Tide	0.20

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

CUSTOMER SERVICE For inquiries, purchase of back issues and complaints, call (670) 235-8747, 235-2440, fax 235-3740.

SUBSCRIPTION Published Monday to Friday, Saipan Tribune offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of $180. For additional subscription information, call (670) 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740.

ADVERTISING For inquiries contact (670) 235-2769. E-mail: sales@saipantribune.com

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/703	3:10AM	10:30PM	4, 7 via ICN
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4,7
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
OZ702/625	12:05PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6 via ICN
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily
OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Ukraine needs money from US, Europe to keep economy running

KYIV, Ukraine (AP)—Ukraine's hard-won economic stability is under threat again as the government faces a large budget hole and its two biggest allies and sponsors—the United States and the European Union—have so far failed to decide on extending more aid.

Without pledges of support by the start of February—when EU leaders meet to decide on aid—and if no money arrives by March, that could risk the progress Ukraine has made against inflation. It has helped ordinary people keep paying rent, put food on the table and resist Russia's efforts to break their society's spirit.

The issue was on the minds of U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy when they met at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Tuesday.

"We're determined to sustain our support" for Ukraine, Blinken said, "we're working very closely with Congress in order to do that. I know our European colleagues are doing the same thing."

Here are key things to know about Ukraine's economy and why funding from allies is crucial:

The International Monetary Fund has said Ukraine's economy has showed " remarkable resilience." The first months of the war in 2022 saw the country lose a third of its economic output to occupation and destruction because Russia controls the heartland of Ukraine's heavy industry.

Inflation also soared to a whopping 26% because the central bank had to print money to cover yawning budget gaps.

However, things rebounded last year, with inflation falling to 5.7% and the economy growing 4.9%—more than some major economies like Germany. Ukraine's banking system has kept functioning, schools and health clinics are open, and pensions are being paid.

That's a lifeline for people like Nadiia Astreiko and her 93-year-old mother, who live on their combined pensions of $170 a month.

"The war has changed everyone's life," said Astreiko, 63. "In terms of money, it's also hard because now I have to count every penny. ... It's very hard for us."

Ukraine spends almost all the money it brings in through taxes to fund the war. That leaves a huge deficit because there are other bills to keep society functioning, like old-age pensions and salaries for teachers, doctors, nurses and state employees.

At the beginning of the war, Ukraine resorted to having the central bank print new money, a dangerous stopgap because it can fuel inflation and destroy the value of the country's hryvnia currency.

As donor contributions became more regular and predictable, Ukraine was able to halt the practice, and the budget passed by parliament in November does not rely on it.

One key accomplishment was adjusting old-age pensions, which can be about the equivalent of $100 per month, to compensate for inflation, said Hlib Vyshlinsky, executive director of the Center for Economic Strategy, a policy institution in Kyiv.

Printing money again and the resulting inflation "would bring a lot of people into real poverty," he said.

To avoid that again, Ukraine needs "a decision by the start of February, and the money by the beginning of March," Vyshlinsky said.

Ukraine is significantly poorer than the rest of Europe. Millions of people are like Astreiko and her mother, with 80% of their money covering food and the rest going to buy medicines for Astreiko's mother.

The only way to afford things like clothes or shoes is to skimp on food and medicine.

The pair eat fish twice a week, and meat once or twice a week. For vegetables, mushrooms and fruit, Astreiko grows them herself or picks them in the forest and cans or freezes them for winter.

Morrico Equipment launches new heavy equipment financing and lease program

» Contractors now have greater access to equipment and vehicles to complete any project

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Morrico Equipment specializes in new and used heavy equipment sales, rental, parts, diesel fuel delivery, Trashco Guam, and diesel repair service.

TAMUNING, Guam—Morrico Equipment, an Atkins Kroll, Inc. company, announced the launch of its first-on-Guam heavy equipment financing and lease solutions, which provides contractors greater access to the diverse range of equipment and vehicles needed to meet the demands of Guam's construction industry.

Morrico Equipment, Guam and Micronesia's premier heavy equipment and commercial vehicle dealership since 1990, created the new program to support the island's contractors during an unprecedented construction boom. Morrico offers a wide range of new and used heavy equipment and commercial vehicles from 20 of the most reputable brands in the industry, all of which can now be leased or financed.

Joel Lesh, vice president and general manager of Morrico Equipment, said, "Morrico Equipment's financing and lease programs allow us to better serve contractors, many of whom are already our valued customers, by providing them with greater access to the cutting-edge equipment and vehicles they need to complete their projects more efficiently and affordably. This initiative empowers contractors to have the flexibility to navigate the dynamic landscape of construction projects while benefiting from our local infrastructure. This program is new for Guam and our way of supporting the evolving needs of the construction industry and the island's economic growth."

Morrico Equipment's financing and lease solutions are supported by First Financial Equipment Leasing for all 20 of Morrico's original equipment manufacturer brands and Daimler Truck Financial for Freightliner vehicles and Thomas Built buses. First Financial Equipment Leasing, headquartered in Southern California and a member of JA Mitsui Leasing, Ltd., has provided financing solutions designed to conserve capital and offer affordable access to increasingly critical, advanced technologies and equipment. Daimler Truck Financial Services is one of the largest captive financial and mobility services companies in the industry and a completely integrated part of the world's largest commercial vehicle manufacturer, Daimler Truck AG.

Morrico Equipment has streamlined the application process to make it easy for contractors to apply. The heavy equipment company enhanced its website—morricoequipment.com—to offer a convenient online application process and an expanded visual inventory of new and used models. Customers can upload their required documents to the online portal or find additional information about the program. For personalized assistance, customers can contact Morrico Equipment's financing team directly at financing@morricoequipment.com to receive guidance on the application process.

Morrico Equipment's leasing option combines the advantages of both renting and buying. Contractors opting to lease can benefit from lower upfront costs as there is typically no requirement for a substantial down payment. One of the most notable benefits of leasing is the ability for contractors to upgrade to new models every few years. Contractors can stay at the forefront of technological advancements and operational efficiency without the long-term commitment associated with purchasing equipment outright.

"Leasing helps contractors to free up capital and avoid tying up valuable credit lines, which gives them better financial agility to manage their projects," said Lesh. "We are confident that this program will transform the landscape of construction on the island and provide contractors with unprecedented access to equipment and vehicles that can improve their efficiency and bottom line."

For more information about Morrico Equipment's financing and lease programs, please visit morricoequipment.com, call (671) 649-1946, or email financing@morricoequipment.com.

About Morrico Equipment

Morrico Equipment specializes in new and used heavy equipment sales, rental, parts, diesel fuel delivery, Trashco Guam, and diesel repair service to Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

Morrico Equipment is based on Guam and was established in 1990 by Allan Morrison along with founding directors Ross Morrison and Torgun Smith. After being acquired by Atkins Kroll, Inc. (an Inchcape Company) in December 2021, Morrico Equipment is one of the largest heavy equipment dealerships in Guam and Micronesia. ***(PR)***

Supreme Court takes up major challenges to sprawling power of federal regulators

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Supreme Court on Wednesday is taking up challenges by commercial fishermen to a fee requirement that could achieve a long-sought goal of business and conservative interests: limiting a wide swath of government regulations.

Billions of dollars are potentially at stake in front of a court that, like the rest of the federal judiciary, was remade during Donald Trump's presidency by conservative interests that were motivated as much by weakening the regulatory state as social issues including abortion.

Lawyers for the fishermen are asking the justices to overturn a 40-year-old decision that is among the most frequently cited high court cases in support of regulatory power, including on the environment, public health, workplace safety and consumer protections.

Lower courts used the decision known colloquially as Chevron to uphold a 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service rule that herring fishermen pay for government-mandated observers who track their fish intake.

The 1984 decision states that when laws aren't crystal clear, federal agencies should be allowed to fill in the details as long as they come up with a reasonable interpretation. "Judges are not experts in the field, and are not part of either political branch of government," Justice John Paul Stevens wrote for the court in 1984, explaining why they should play a limited role. The court ruled 6-0, with three justices recused.

But the current high court, with a 6-3 conservative majority that includes three appointees of Trump, has been increasingly skeptical of the powers of federal agencies. At least four justices—Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh—have questioned the Chevron decision.

Opponents of the Chevron doctrine argue that judges apply it too often to rubber-stamp decisions made by government bureaucrats. Judges must exercise their own authority and judgment to say what the law is, the lawyers for the company that owns the Rhode Island based Relentless and Persistence fishing boats told the court.

They also say that agencies effectively act as judges in their own cases. "It is patently unfair for a court to defer to an agency's interpretation in cases where the agency itself is a litigant, before that same court, in the actual case at hand," the lawyers wrote.

Defending the rulings that upheld the fees, the Biden administration said that overturning the Chevron decision would produce a "convulsive shock" to the legal system.

"Chevron gives appropriate weight to the expertise, often of a scientific or technical nature, that federal agencies can bring to bear in interpreting federal statutes," Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar wrote on behalf of the administration.

Nation

Pacific Northwest hunkers down for ice and freezing rain

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—Parts of the Pacific Northwest were under an ice storm warning through Wednesday morning, threatening to add to the damage brought by a powerful winter storm that hit the region over the weekend.

Area of southwest Washington and western Oregon—including that state's largest cities of Portland, Salem and Eugene—were expecting to see a quarter-inch to an inch (6 to 25 millimeters) of ice, while freezing rain was forecast in the Seattle area.

Schools were closed in many places, bus service curtailed and warming shelters opened while officials warned of continued treacherous road conditions and the chance of new power outages, even as crews struggled to restore electricity to thousands who have been blacked out for days.

The forecast came as much of the United States coped with bitter weather that in some places put electricity supplies at risk. Another day of record cold temperatures swept much of the Rockies, Great Plains and Midwest on Tuesday, with wind chills below minus 30 (minus 34.4 Celsius) extending into the mid-Mississippi Valley. On the East Coast, meanwhile, New York and Philadelphia ended a drought of sorts with enough snow falling for play in both cities.

The Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity in seven states, asked customers to voluntarily cut back, citing a high demand for power because of the cold. A similar plea came from the grid operator in Texas.

AP

Workers from PG&E work on restoring power to the area after a storm on Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2024, in Lake Oswego, Ore.

In Oregon, transportation officials closed 47 miles (76 kilometers) of Interstate 84, a major east-west highway that runs from Portland through the Columbia River Gorge due the threat of ice.

In the mountains, the National Weather Service warned of heavy snow in the Cascades with winds gusting to 50 mph (80 kph), mixed with freezing rain and ice that could make travel "very difficult to impossible." A storm warning was up through Thursday afternoon.

The Pacific Northwest is more known for rain and wasn't set to experience such Arctic temperatures but the heavily forested region is especially prone to the danger of falling trees and power lines, particularly during ice storms.

"We're lucky to be alive," said Justin Brooks, as he used a chainsaw Tuesday to cut up the trunks of two massive trees that narrowly missed his home in Lake Oswego, Oregon, when they fell on Saturday.

Elsewhere in Lake Oswego on Tuesday, arborist Ryan Cafferky scaled a towering 150-foot (46-meter) tree to start the laborious process of cutting it down. The city had deemed the 120-year-old tree a threat to the public because it was at risk of falling, he said.

As of Tuesday night, about 52,000 people in Oregon still remained without power, according to the website poweroutage.us. Forecasters warned residents to prepare for more power outages.

In the Portland metropolitan area, some two dozen commuter buses had suspended service or were being detoured to avoid dangerous roads since storms walloped the area a few days ago.

Weekend weather that included snow and strong winds was blamed for at least seven deaths, including that of a man killed when a tree struck his house in Lake Oswego and a woman who died when a tree crushed a recreational vehicle in Portland, trapping her and causing a fire, authorities said.

Five people in Oregon were believed to have died of hypothermia, authorities said.

Warmer air was expected to provide some relief from the frigid weather starting later Wednesday.

However, the icy morning forecast prompted Portland Public Schools, the largest district in the state, to cancel classes for a second day on Wednesday, citing concerns about possible power problems, burst pipes and unsafe school walkways and parking lots.

Trump glowers and gestures in court, then leaves to campaign as sex abuse defamation trial opens

NEW YORK (AP)—Donald Trump shook his head in disgust Tuesday as the judge in his New York defamation trial told would-be jurors that an earlier jury had already decided the former president sexually abused columnist E. Jean Carroll in the 1990s.

Trump left court before opening statements, jetting to a New Hampshire political rally as Carroll's lawyer accused the Republican presidential frontrunner of using "the world's biggest microphone" to destroy her reputation and turn his supporters against her. Trump's lawyer contended that Carroll has never been more famous and that she is blaming him for "a few mean tweets from Twitter trolls."

Fresh from a political win Monday in the Iowa caucuses, Trump detoured to a Manhattan courtroom for the start of what amounts to the penalty phase of Carroll's civil lawsuit alleging he attacked her at a department store in 1996. Trump departed Tuesday after the nine-member jury was selected.

He glared and scowled at times as the jury was being picked, slyly raising his hand at one point when Judge Lewis A. Kaplan asked if anyone felt Trump had been treated unfairly by the court system. The gesture drew laughs from some people in the courtroom and a retort from the judge, who said, "We know where you stand."

Trump, the former president, and Carroll, the former longtime Elle Magazine columnist, sat at separate tables about a dozen feet (3.7 meters) apart, flanked by their respective legal teams. They didn't appear to speak or make eye contact.

After Trump left, Carroll's lawyer Shawn Crowley implored jurors to make him pay—potentially millions of dollars—for comments he made while president in response to her claims in a 2019 memoir that he sexually abused her years earlier at Manhattan's Bergdorf Goodman store.

Trump "used the world's biggest microphone to attack Ms. Carroll," Crowley said in her opening statement. His comments, including claims that Carroll was lying to sell books, humiliated the writer and tore "her reputation to shreds," the lawyer said.

"He said this from the White House, a place where presidents have signed laws, declared wars and decided the fate of the nation," Crowley told jurors.

While the trial concerns what Trump must pay for his comments in the immediate aftermath of Carroll's revelations, Crowley noted that his rhetoric about the writer hasn't stopped. Trump maintains he never abused Carroll and says her allegations are a partisan smear.

From court Tuesday, Trump fired off a series of social media posts about the case. He wrote on his Truth Social platform that Carroll's rape allegation was an "attempted EXTORTION" involving "fabricated lies and political shenanigans," and he accused the judge of having "absolute hatred" for him.

Crowley told jurors their job was to answer the question about Trump: "How much money will it take to make him to stop?"

However, Trump attorney Alina Habba said he was "merely defending himself" and said evidence will show that Carroll's career has prospered since accusing him. Carroll has been "thrust back into the limelight like she always has wanted," Habba said in her opening argument.

Responding to Crowley's assertion that Trump backers have sent Carroll violent threats, Habba said she sympathized with victims of sexual abuse but any backlash Carroll suffered was "simply a byproduct of the digital age."

"Regardless of a few mean tweets, Ms. Carroll is now more famous than she has ever been in her life, and loved and respected by many, which was her goal," Habba told jurors.

Biden invites congressional leaders to White House during difficult talks on Ukraine aid

WASHINGTON (AP)—President Joe Biden has invited the top four congressional leaders and other lawmakers to the White House on Wednesday as members have struggled to reach agreement on U.S. aid for the Ukraine war. Republicans have insisted on pairing it with their own demands for securing the U.S. border.

A bipartisan group of negotiators in the Senate has been working for weeks to find an agreement that would provide wartime money for Ukraine and Israel and also include new border policy that is strong enough to satisfy Republicans in both chambers. The talks appeared to slow last week as senators said significant disagreements remained.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Tuesday that the lawmakers—including Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.,—were invited to meet with Biden "to discuss the critical importance of his national security supplemental requests."

Biden's top budget official warned earlier this month about the rapidly diminishing time that lawmakers have to replenish U.S. aid for Ukraine. Shalanda Young, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, stressed that there is no avenue to help Ukraine aside from Congress approving additional funding to help Kyiv as it fends off Russia in a war that is now nearly two years old.

While the Pentagon has some limited authority to help Kyiv absent new funding from Capitol Hill, Young said at the first of the month, "that is not going to get big tranches of equipment into Ukraine."

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos this week. In an appearance Tuesday following the meeting, Sullivan said he remained confident the Biden administration would come to an agreement on Ukraine aid in the coming weeks.

"What I will say is that we've got to be able to deliver the necessary resources to Ukraine for the weapons that it needs to be able to achieve the results that it needs," Sullivan said in conversation with Børge Brende, president of the World Economic Forum. "I continue to believe and express confidence that we will…after a lot of twists and turns ultimately get there."

Asia

ASIAN BRIEFS

China blasts president of PH for congratulating Taiwan election winner

BEIJING (AP)—China's Foreign Ministry summoned the Philippine ambassador Tuesday and denounced President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s congratulatory message to the winner of Taiwan's presidential election, Lai Ching-te. Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters that Marcos's remarks "seriously violated the political commitments made by the Philippines to China and rudely interfered in China's internal affairs." China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be recovered by force if necessary, and angrily condemns statements that appear to confer legitimacy on the island's government. "We would like to sternly tell the Philippines not to play with fire on the Taiwan issue ... (and) immediately stop making wrong words and deeds on Taiwan-related issues, and stop sending any wrong signals to Taiwan independence and separatist forces," Mao said. She said Assistant Foreign Affairs Minister Nong Rong summoned the Philippine Ambassador to China Tuesday morning and "made solemn representations, and urged the Philippines to give China a responsible explanation." Marcos Jr. congratulated Taiwan's president-elect on Monday, saying in a statement shared on social media that he was looking "forward to close collaboration" and "strengthening mutual interests." Lai, who is detested by Beijing, has pledged to safeguard the island's de-facto independence from China and further align it with other democracies.

Top Chinese diplomat says support of Pacific nations with policing should not alarm Australia

CANBERRA, Australia (AP)—China's ambassador to Australia, Xiao Qian, sought to reassure Wednesday that China's increased involvement in the Pacific, particularly in policing efforts, should not be a cause of alarm for Australia. Xiao, speaking at his first news conference of the year in Canberra on Wednesday, maintained that Australia should not harbor anxiety about China's intentions in the region. "Pacific Islands countries is an area where China and Australia can cooperate and can contribute together instead of asking them to choose between the two," Xiao said. "What China has been doing is to help them to for their social stability, economic development and for bilateral trade relations." Concerns of China's encroachment in the South Pacific had escalated last year when the Solomon Islands signed a security pact with China, raising fears of a military buildup in the region. "We're not seeking military strategies, we're not seeking military purposes, and there's no need for any so-called anxiety on the part of Australia," Xiao said. Addressing Nauru's decision on Tuesday to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, Xiao said it was a sovereign choice by Nauru and would not impact Australia's relations with the small island nation. "The relation between China and Nauru is a reflection of the overwhelming, increasing consensus in the international community that in this world, there's only one China, and Taiwan is part of China."

US, S. Korea, Japan conduct naval drills as tensions deepen with N. Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—The United States, South Korea and Japan conducted combined naval exercises involving an American aircraft carrier in their latest show of strength against nuclear-armed North Korea, South Korea's military said Wednesday, as the three countries' senior diplomats were to meet in Seoul to discuss the deepening standoff with Pyongyang. The training in waters off South Korea's Jeju island came as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continues a provocative run in weapons testing and threats that has raised regional tensions to their highest point in years. At Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament this week, Kim declared that North Korea would abandon its long-standing commitment to a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of North's constitution to eliminate the idea of a shared statehood between the war-divided countries. His speech on Monday came a day after the North conducted its first ballistic test of 2024, which state-media described as a new solid-fuel intermediate range missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead, reflecting its push to advance its lineup of weapons targeting U.S. military bases in Guam and Japan. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the trilateral naval drills, which completed its three-day program on Wednesday, involved nine warships from the countries, including U.S. aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and Aegis destroyers from South Korea and Japan.

Pakistan condemns Iran over bombing allegedly targeting militants that killed 2 people

ISLAMABAD (AP)—Pakistan on Wednesday condemned Iran for launching airstrikes the previous day that Tehran claimed targeted bases for a militant Sunni separatist group. Islamabad angrily denounced the attack as a "blatant violation" of its airspace and said it killed two children. Tuesday's strike in Pakistan's restive southwestern Baluchistan province imperiled diplomatic relations between the two neighbors—Iran and nuclear-armed Pakistan have long regarded each other with suspicion over militant attacks. However, both sides appeared wary of provoking the other. The attack also threatened to further ignite violence in a Middle East unsettled by Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Iran launched strikes late Monday in Iraq and Syria over an Islamic State-claimed suicide bombing that killed over 90 people earlier this month. In state media reports, which were later withdrawn without explanation, Iran said its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard targeted bases for the militant group Jaish al-Adl, or the "Army of Justice."

Almost 100,000 Afghan children are in dire need of support, 3 months after earthquakes, UNICEF says

ISLAMABAD (AP)—Almost 100,000 children in Afghanistan are in dire need of support, three months after earthquakes devastated the country's west, the U.N. children's agency said Monday. A 6.3-magnitude earthquake shook Herat province on Oct. 7 and a second strong quake struck the same province days later, on Oct. 11, killing more than 1,000 people. The majority of those dead in the quakes in Zinda Jan and Injil districts were women and children, and 21,000 homes were destroyed, UNICEF said in a statement. "The atmosphere in these villages is thick with suffering even 100 days after the earthquakes in western Afghanistan when families lost absolutely everything," said Fran Equiza, UNICEF representative in Afghanistan.

World

Chaotic wave of attacks, reprisals fuel worries of wider regional war

AP

This undated photograph released by the U.S. military's Central Command shows what it is described as Iranian-made missile components bound for Yemen's Houthi seized off a vessel in the Arabian Sea.

WASHINGTON (AP)—A barrage of U.S., coalition and militant attacks in the Middle East over the last five days are compounding U.S. fears that Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza could expand, as massive military strikes failed to stall the assault on Red Sea shipping by Yemen-based Houthis.

Even as the U.S. and allies pummeled more than two dozen Iran-backed Houthi locations on Friday in retaliation for attacks on ships, the Houthis have continued their maritime assaults. And Tehran struck sites in Iraq and Syria, claiming to target an Israeli "spy headquarters," then followed that Tuesday with reported missile and drone attacks in Pakistan.

The chaotic wave of attacks and reprisals involving the United States, its allies and foes suggested not only that last week's assault had failed to deter the Houthis, but that the broader regional war that the U.S. has spent months trying to avoid was becoming closer to reality. And underscoring the gravity of the roiling situation, the Biden administration is expected to announce plans to redesignate the Houthis as global terrorists, according to people familiar with the decision who requested anonymity to discuss the matter ahead of its announcement.

At the White House earlier Tuesday, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby stressed that the U.S. is "not looking for a war. We're not looking to expand this. The Houthis have a choice to make." But in a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned that the expanding array of attacks mean that allies must "be vigilant against the possibility that in fact, rather than heading towards de-escalation, we are on a path of escalation that we have to manage."

Ever since the devastating attack by Hamas on Israel on Oct. 7 triggered a massive air and ground campaign by Israeli forces, the U.S. and other allies have worried about it expanding to a broader regional war. U.S. diplomatic and military officials have shuttled urgently across the Middle East, working to ease tensions but the enormous Palestinian death toll has fueled anger and is being touted as a reason for at least some of the attacks.

Since November, the Houthis have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea, saying they were avenging Israel's offensive against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade.

At Davos, Zelenskyy lashes out at Putin, presses allies to boost Ukraine's fight

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP)—Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy came out swinging Tuesday against Russian leader Vladimir Putin at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, while urging political and business leaders facing war fatigue in the West to enforce sanctions, help rebuild his country and advance the peace process.

Zelenskyy is trying to keep his country's long and largely stalemated defense against Russia on the minds of political leaders, as Israel's war with Hamas, which passed the 100-day mark this week, siphons off much of the world's attention and has sparked concerns about a wider conflict in the Middle East.

He sought to center Ukraine as a pillar in defense of democracies.

"Anyone thinks this is only about us, this is only about Ukraine, they are fundamentally mistaken," Zelenskyy said in a speech at the Swiss ski resort.

"Putin embodies war," he said, lashing out at the Kremlin leader for leveling cities and imposing "the terrifying feeling that the war may never end." He also offered criticism for a world that told him not to worsen tensions ahead of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

"After Feb. 24th, nothing harmed our coalition more than this concept. Every 'Don't escalate' to us, sounded like 'You will prevail' to Putin," Zelenskyy said.

He thanked allies for sanctions on Moscow but urged them to ensure they work. He said he believed the European Union and U.S. would come through in "a matter of weeks" with more aid that has been held up by political infighting within his two biggest allies.

Environment

US in deep freeze while much of the world is extra toasty? Yet again, it's CLIMATE CHANGE

By SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

Much of the United States is shivering through brutal cold as most of the rest of the world is feeling unusually warm weather. However strange it sounds, that contradiction fits snugly in explanations of what climate change is doing to Earth, scientists said.

In a map of global temperatures the last several days, big chunks of the world—the Arctic, Asia, parts of Africa, the Middle East and South America—show as dark red, signifying more than a dozen degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 20th-century average. But the United States stands out like a cold thumb—a deep bluish-purple that is just as out of whack but on the frigid side.

Wind chills in parts of North Dakota reached minus 70 degrees (minus 56 degrees Celsius), while the heat index in Miami was more than 160 degrees warmer at 92 (33 degrees Celsius). The fourth-coldest NFL football game took place in Kansas City, while across the globe the thermometer hit a blistering 92 degrees, 12 degrees (6.8 degrees Celsius) warmer than average on Friday during tennis' Australian Open in Melbourne. Warm temperature records fell overnight in Aruba, Curacao, parts of Argentina, Oman and Iran.

Where weather was warmer than usual, it was happening both in the southern hemisphere, which is in summer, and in the northern hemisphere, which is in winter. For example, Oman, in the north, had its warmest January night ever at 79.5 degrees (26.4 degrees Celsius). Argentina, in the south, had a record for warmest January night at 81.1 Fahrenheit (27.3 Celsius).

If it seems as if the world has gone topsy-turvy, in a way it has. Because this all comes from what's happening in the Arctic, where it used to be warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. Now, it's warming three to four times faster.

"When the Arctic is off-the-charts warm (like now), we're more likely to see frigid cold invade places like Texas that are ill-equipped to deal with it," said Jennifer Francis, a Woodwell Research Center climate scientist and a pioneer in the theory of Arctic Amplification, which links the cold outbreaks to climate change. "Rapid Arctic warming is one of the clearest symptoms of human-caused climate change, making winter extremes more likely even as the globe warms overall."

AP

A worker pauses while removing snow from Highmark Stadium in Orchard Park, N.Y., Jan. 14, 2024.

The way the cold is invading is through a weather phrase that is becoming increasingly familiar to Americans: The polar vortex. It's a weather term that goes back to 1853 but has only been frequently used in the past decade or so.

That could be because the icy stabs are happening more often, said winter weather expert Judah Cohen of Atmospheric Environmental Research, a commercial firm outside of Boston.

The polar vortex is strong, icy weather that usually stays over the top of the planet, penned in by strong winds that whip around it, Cohen said.

It's like an ice skater spinning rapidly with her arms tucked in, he said. But when the polar vortex weakens, the arms start flailing out, the skater slips and "all the cold air then gets released away from the center of the polar vortex," Cohen said.

The current cold outbreak is consistent with Arctic change and the polar vortex, Cohen said. "What we found is when the polar vortex stretches like a rubber band, severe extreme winter weather is much more likely in the United States. That's where it tends to be focused and in January we have an extreme case of that stretching of the polar vortex."

This one is stronger and may last longer than most, Cohen said.

Cohen and others have done studies that show the polar vortex outbreaks have become more frequent in recent decades.

The idea is the jet stream—the upper air circulation that drives weather—is wavier in amplified global warming, said University of Wisconsin-Madison climate scientist Steve Vavrus. And those wave changes in the upper air knock the polar vortex out of its place and toward the United States, Cohen said.

It's a theory still debated by climate scientists but growing in acceptance. Initially, Vavrus and Francis theorized it was due to melting Arctic sea ice leading to barometic pressure changes. Now several scientists say it's more complicated, yet still connected to climate change and the supercharged warming in the Arctic, with other factors like Siberian snow cover and other atmospheric waves also playing a role.

"The key takeaway for me right now is that Arctic Amplification is happening and has complex interactions within our climate system. Winter will always bring us cold weather, but like the warm season it may be changing ways that we understand and ways that we are still learning about," said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd. "Unlike the Vegas slogan, what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic."

Think of what's happening as an orchestra making one symphony, and "what's driving all those orchestra instruments is a warming planet," Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini said.

Gensini and Cohen said this cold snap in the United States will fade in several days to be replaced by unusually warm weather, due to climate change. But another polar vortex looks like it's coming at the end of the month, though not as strong as this one, they said.

Despite the U.S. cold, Earth's global average temperature keeps flirting with daily, weekly and monthly records, as it has for more than seven months. That's because the United States is only 2% of Earth's surface, scientists said.

This is not a climate-change abstraction: Forests are disappearing

By ARJUN V.K. SHARMA
Los Angeles Times

Beside my childhood home, there lies a forest. I'd long thought it a stretch to call it that, even though a sign beside a small and inviting break in the wall of beech and maple trees said otherwise. It covers no more than 20 acres. A city bus runs along its western edge.

Over the years, however, my outlook shifted. As the neighborhood grew, and as each autumn wrestled the canopy of gold and crimson to the ground, exposing a sinewy understory, that humble patch of trees stayed. It held a certain magic: of permanence. I imagine when most people think of forests they summon a similar sense of everlastingness—the ability to endure a world in flux.

But the permanence of this little forest on the edge of Toronto, it sadly turns out, is not the story of most trees.

Our forests are disappearing. According to a recent report from the World Wildlife Fund, 6.6 million hectares of forest were lost in 2022. It's a mind-boggling statistic, especially since it represents 21% more forest cover than should have been lost that year to keep pace to end deforestation by 2030—a pledge from the 2021 United Nations climate conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland. At last year's COP28 in Dubai, world leaders renewed their pledge to reverse deforestation.

Yet forests are still being cleared at a dizzying pace. In 2022, the world lost more than 11 soccer fields of tropical forest per minute.

Environmental crises are for many people an abstraction, and so can seem their repercussions. But I am a physician in infectious diseases, and my first instinct when looking at a forest is to see it through the lens of a microbe. Microbes can bring diseases to humans, and for that reason the World Health Organization has applied a philosophy to them called One Health. Simply, it's a belief that the fitness of humans, animals and the environment are one and the same—inextricably linked.

Trees play a seminal role: Removing a forest can push forest-dwelling animals into human environs, sometimes bringing with them a pathogen. That chain of events has been tied to Ebola flare-ups in Central and West Africa and the upswing of Lyme disease in the northeastern United States. And it harms animals too: In subtropical parts of Australia where forests are blithely cleared, bats experience profound stress from human-induced land change. Access to the diet of their native habitats is taken away, and in a nutritionally deprived state, they are known to shed greater amounts of the Hendra virus—which can pass on to horses and then humans, with high fatality rates.

After the loss of a forest, it's not just what is added to our lives that can pose a problem. It's also what's taken away. Forests have traditionally functioned as "carbon sinks." The Earth's trees absorb more than 7 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide —about a fifth of what the world lets out into its atmosphere—and release it back as oxygen or bind it into sugars that form their roots, branches and leaves. Felling a forest unlocks this carbon vault. Some parts of the Amazon are so razed that they've become carbon sources— leeching more carbon than they soak up. About 12% of the global greenhouse gas emissions that warm the planet are estimated to derive from deforestation.

Then there's evidence showing the extent to which forests influence our mental health. Poorer air quality, a byproduct of deforestation, is linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety. By contrast, research has found that the more a country's landmass is covered by forests, the lower its prevalence of mental health disorders. In the 1980s, Japan even pioneered a form of therapy around trees: s hinrin-yoku, also known as "forest bathing," which seeks to harness psychologically restorative effects from being outdoors. The practice has become fairly popular in California, and here in Canada some doctors prescribe it.

So what can be done? Saving the world's forests requires understanding the cultural and economic motivations that clear them in the first place.

Some solutions have to be localized to the millions of people who are still sustained by forests. In Borneo, for instance, some Indigenous communities with few economic options turn to illegal logging to make ends meet. But researchers found that subsidizing a local clinic to make healthcare more affordable and accessible reduced this problem. In some logging-dependent communities, forest charities such as Alam Sehat Lestari buy people's chainsaws in return for a zero-interest loan and support in shifting to more environmentally sustainable businesses, like beekeeping or fishing.

Ultimately, however, three-quarters of global deforestation is driven by agriculture—a reality that calls for ambitious legislation. The European Union's regulation on deforestation-free supply chains imposes trade embargoes on products such as palm oil, cattle and soy that are frequently produced on illegally deforested lands, and in the U.S., the FOREST Act is a bipartisan bill that would take a similar approach. Brazil has already shown some promise in slowing the deforestation trend.

It's easy enough for leaders to make pledges. What remains to be seen is if they'll be able to see the forest from the trees and produce real change rather than an empty promise.

Life & Style

‘Mean Girls’ takes 1st place at the box office. So fetch.

By LINDSEY BAHR
AP FILM WRITER

AP

This image released by Paramount Pictures shows Avantika, from left, Angourie Rice, Renee Rapp and Bebe Wood in a scene from “Mean Girls.”

Winter storms and cinema closures in North America didn’t dampen the opening weekend for “ Mean Girls. “ The Paramount release, adapted from the Broadway musical and the 2004 Tina Fey movie, earned $28 million in its first three days in theaters according to studio estimates Sunday. Not accounting for inflation, that’s more than the $24.4 million the first movie made in its opening weekend.

The “Mean Girls” competition over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend featured several new releases, including the Jason Statham action movie “ The Beekeeper “ and the Jay-Z produced biblical satire “The Book of Clarence,” in addition to a slew of awards contenders capitalizing on buzz from recent nominations and the Golden Globes.

As with “Barbie,” another enthusiastically pink movie, female audiences made up the vast majority (76%) of opening weekend ticket buyers for “Mean Girls.” According to exit polls, 70% were between the ages of 18 and 34, which, yes, means that it had appeal for audiences who hadn’t been born when Regina George was first introduced to the world.

“The property is iconic,” said Chris Aronson, Paramount’s president of domestic distribution. “Tina Fey is legendary and her contemporary twist has resonated with audiences, particularly the female audience.”

This iteration of “Mean Girls” stars Angourie Rice, Auli’i Cravalho and Reneé Rapp, who played Regina on stage. It was originally planned to go straight to streaming on Paramount+, but the studio pivoted after test scores were positive. Social media played a big part in getting the word out and “Mean Girls” also inspired groups of friends to go to the movies together. An estimated 40% went with two or more friends.

Fey returned to write and co-star in the new film, which was directed by Samantha Jayne and Arturo Perez Jr. and cost a reported $36 million to produce. Reviews have been more positive than not, with a 70% on Rotten Tomatoes, but audiences gave it a B CinemaScore which may not bode especially well for word-of-mouth appeal. Recent musicals like “Wonka” and “The Color Purple” scored in the A-range. The studio is optimistic after this weekend though. It also made $6.5 million from 16 international markets.

“It’s no secret that the release calendar is a little light for the first couple months of the year and because of the reception to this film we stand a chance of broadening this audience,” Aronson said. “It really is a crowd-pleaser.”

Amazon and MGM’s “The Beekeeper” debuted in second place with an estimated $16.8 million from 3,303 theaters. Men made up approximately 62% of ticket buyers and audiences overall gave it a B+ CinemaScore. By the end of the four-day weekend, the studio expects it to have made $19.1 million. Miramax handled the international distribution for “The Beekeper,” which also grossed $20.4 million from 49 territories.

Third place went to “Wonka,” which added $8.4 million in its fifth weekend. The Timothée Chalamet-led musical has now made over $178 million domestically and $500 million globally.

- “Mean Girls,” $28 million.
- “The Beekeeper,” $16.8 million.
- “Wonka,” $8.4 million.
- “Anyone But You,” $6.9 million.
- “Migration,” $6.2 million.
- “Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom,” $5.3 million.
- “Night Swim,” $4.7 million.
- “The Boys in the Boat,” $3.5 million.
- “The Book of Clarence,”$2.6 million.
- “The Iron Claw,” $2.4 million.

Emmy Awards get record low ratings with audience of 4.3M

LOS ANGELES (AP)— The Emmy Awards telecast on Fox reached a record low audience of 4.3 million viewers, as the long-term trend of diminishing ratings for the show continues.

The Nielsen company said Tuesday that the Monday night show hosted by Anthony Anderson with "Succession" and "The Bear" raking in most of the top awards was down from the previous record low of 5.9 million for NBC's telecast in 2022, the last time the event was held.

This year's Emmys had a lot working against them. They were was delayed four months from its usual September spot by Hollywood's writers and actors strikes, and had to compete with both an NFL playoff game and coverage of the Iowa caucuses in the presidential campaign.

The audience was less than half of what the CBS telecast of the Golden Globes got eight days earlier. That show, which honored both TV and movies and had bigger stars in attendance including Taylor Swift, had 9.4 million viewers.

The Emmys and Anderson got generally positive reviews for a show that spent much of its time honoring past television, with reunions and set recreations from shows including "Cheers," "Martin" and "Grey's Anatomy." Variety called it "delightful" while The Hollywood Reporter praised its "polish, proficiency and emotion."

But that didn't help the continuing decline in numbers.

The height-of-the-pandemic Emmys in 2020 on ABC, with no in-person audience and remote nominees, set a new low at the time with 6.1 million viewers, but the show bounced back the following year with 7.4 million for CBS.

Then the decline began again in 2022.

The four broadcast networks rotate airings of the show.

The last time the Emmys reached more than 10 million viewers was 2018, when it drew in 10.2 million. The show had 21.8 million viewers in 2000, a level it's unlikely ever to reach again.

Family fails to be there when needed most

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

DEAR ABBY: Somehow I became the go-to person for everyone in my family—siblings as well as parents. I have the means, and for decades, I have been happy to help. I recently lost a brother, and I assumed the people I’ve been there for would be there to support ME.

Abby, they ALL failed. Two didn’t show up at all, and two came and left so fast my head spun. It was a two-part ceremony. My gathering was the first. I was so hurt I didn’t want to go to the second gathering, but I wanted to honor my brother, so I went. Bad decision. My deceased brother had one enemy, and that person was invited to speak and ruined it ALL for me.

My husband was so upset he told my family off and said that I had been crying for days. No one cared enough to contact me to clear things up. Instead, they doubled down and called me selfish for needing them to be there for me.

Now I’m hurt and upset, and I have no family to turn to. Honestly, it’s nothing new, but I think I’m so hurt because I feel this is the end of family functions forever. What do you think?

FULL OF EMOTION

DEAR FULL: I am sorry for your loss. Because you have been the family rescuer and in return were treated with disrespect and indifference, you have every right to be upset. I hope that in the future you will begin to develop relationships with people who show some reciprocity. Because you appear to come from a family of “takers,” enlarging your circle will give you a better chance of having healthier (not to mention more rewarding) relationships. PLEASE consider it.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: I met a woman online from out of state, and we hit it off. We dated for three years before she moved here and we were married. At that time, she was estranged from her family. She recently started to repair her relationship with a daughter and would visit her. Our marriage had been showing a few cracks as her emotional state was growing worse due to her loneliness. She worked from home, and I worked some overtime to supplement our income.

With my blessing, she has since moved to her daughter’s state to be near her grandkids. I do not want to travel to keep a marriage going. I’m too old to do that. She has medical issues, so she benefits from my insurance.

We’ve been married only a year and a half. If I bring up a divorce because of the travel and the fact that we have grown apart, I’m afraid she’ll ask for half my pension that I’ve worked my whole life for. What do you advise?

FEELING STUCK IN MISSOURI

DEAR FEELING STUCK: I urge you to discuss this matter with a family law attorney licensed to practice in the state of Missouri. I’m not a lawyer (obviously), but from where I sit on the West Coast, it appears your wife DESERTED you when she moved away to be closer to her daughter, and your marriage has died in its infancy. I wish you luck. (Please let me know how this turns out.)

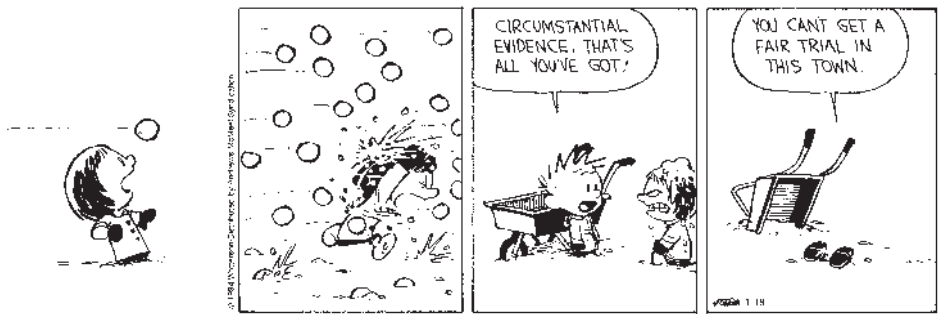
■■■

To receive a collection of Abby’s most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



Garfield®

By Jim Davis

I SHALL NOW REPORT THE NEWS...
THROUGH INTERPRETATIVE DANCE
WHOA, THE CITY COUNCIL PASSED A NEW ZONING ORDINANCE, AND MAIN STREET IS BEING REPAVED

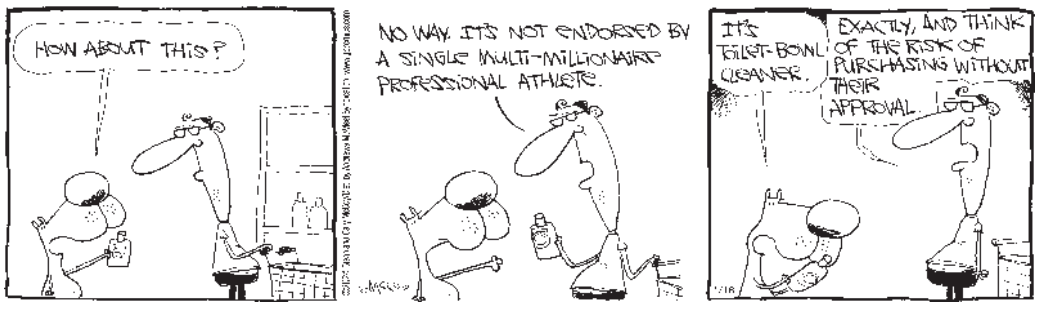
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

SOMEONE'S DREAM CONTINUES
HERE WE ARE. THE BIG CASINO.
YEP.
ANY IDEA WHAT WE DO IN THERE?
NO. BUT I'VE HEARD YOU "ALWAYS DOUBLE DOWN ON ELEVEN."
I COULD PROBABLY USE A NAPPY FIRST.
IT'S LIKE YOU READ MY MIND. I THINK THESE SEATS RECLINE.

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


HOW ABOUT THIS?
NO WAY. IT'S NOT ENDORSED BY A SINGLE MULTI-MILLIONAIRE PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE.
IT'S TOILET-BOWL CLEANER.
EXACTLY, AND THINK OF THE RISK OF PURCHASING WITHOUT THEIR APPROVAL.

CROSSWORD

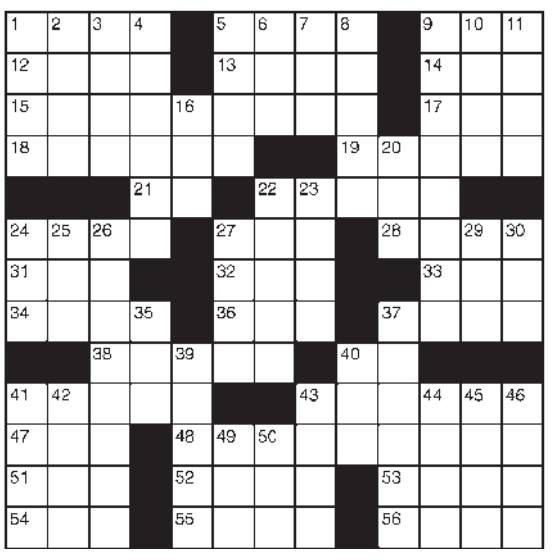
By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Throat clearer
5 Idle or Bana
9 Wild bunch
12 Harboring a grudge
13 First-rate
14 Mimic
15 Turban, for one
17 "Game, —, match!"
18 Op-ed pieces
19 Insurance giant
21 "— Cid" (Massenet opera)
22 Narrow inlet
24 Slangy refusals
27 Fella
28 Vend
31 Get older
32 Poetic tribute
33 Small battery
34 Gravy vessel
36 Pvt.'s superior
37 Japanese noodle
38 Can-can, in Cannes
40 AMA member
41 "Please explain"
43 Guinness Book datum
47 Bird (Pref.)
48 Fan of Iron Maiden and Megadeth
51 Coop dweller
52 Big fusses
53 Actress Swenson
54 Moreover
55 Hoodwink
56 Prying

DOWN
1 Queens stadium name
2 Tackles weeds
3 Historic periods
4 Olympic awards
5 Canal zones?
6 Caviar base
7 — and outs
8 Activist Chavez
9 Magazine staff listing
10 Store sign
11 Alpha follower
16 Decorate Easter eggs
20 Roswell visitors
22 Gooey treat
23 "Yeah, right"
24 Catch red-handed
25 In the past
26 Sailing challenge
27 Employer
29 "7 Faces of Dr. —"
30 PC linkup
35 Prof's aides
37 Ragamuffin
39 Wanderer
40 N.J. neighbor
41 "Funny!"
42 It takes the cake
43 Demolish, in Dover
44 Wine (Pref.)
45 Tatters
46 Crucial time
49 College URL ender
50 Pinnacle

Solution time: 24 mins.

Yesterday's answer 1-18



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Jason Segel, 44; Jesse L. Martin, 55; Mark Messier, 63; Kevin Costner, 69.

Happy Birthday: Express yourself. What you command will come your way. Be adventurous, and make changes that push you to follow your heart and dreams. Opportunity comes to those willing to embrace change. Share your thoughts, and the right people will tag along. Your progress this year will help build a foundation that won't disappoint you. Live your life to the fullest, and take responsibility for your happiness. Your numbers are 5, 12, 17, 23, 25, 34, 46.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Personal gain is the goal. Get active, take care of yourself physically and strive to live a lifestyle that encourages you to finish what you start. Updating your image will encourage you to get out and showcase what you have to offer. ✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Make your move. You've got more going for you than you realize. Second-guessing yourself will lead to regret. Follow your instincts and go after your dreams. Hard work will lead to the benefits you desire. Joint ventures will disappoint you. ✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Patience is necessary to avoid letting someone take advantage of you. Set boundaries to protect against those trying to mislead or damage your reputation. Focus on truth, taking care of your responsibilities and protecting your health and well-being. Put your needs first. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Your contacts will help you reach your objective. Be brave and make your voice heard. Take the initiative to build your brand and do things your way. Your dedication and passion will inspire others and push you to expand your endeavors. ✪✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Deviating from your plan because someone wants you to go big or go home will lead to disaster. Concentrate on what you know and do best, and launch your plans with finesse. How you do things counts. ✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Stay out of harm's way regarding relationships, and run toward and engage in prospects that make a difference to how you live and what you do moving forward. Communication will lead to opportunity and prosperity. ✪✪✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Stay focused on doing your best. Don't let someone push you into projects that don't interest you. Pay attention to detail where finances and contracts are concerned. You can get ahead if you are astute and call the shots instead of bending to someone's demands. ✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Pay attention to detail; what you do will bring higher returns. An emotional incident will turn into an opportunity to make a positive change. It's OK to do things differently and say no to engaging in something that benefits others more than you. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Confusion will surface due to misleading gestures. The best way to stabilize a situation is to be direct. Protect yourself physically from illness or injury. Avoid situations that put you in an awkward position or allow someone to take advantage of you. Focus on self-improvement. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

COPYRIGHT 2007 UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Don't hesitate. You are a think tank, so act and make things happen. Embrace new beginnings and bask in what life offers. Use your imagination and take pleasure in breaking new ground. Put your energy into thought, and turn your ideas into something tangible. ✪✪✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Reach out to people with something to offer. Be willing to adjust to meet your demands, and you'll discover a comfortable path. Following through with your plans will encourage new opportunities and interesting connections. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Take control and head in a direction that promises to meet your expectations. Get involved in campaigns you believe in, and share your concerns and suggestions with well-connected people. The outcome will lead to opportunities that stretch far beyond your original plans. ✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are bold, persistent and devoted. You are engaging and unique.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

			4				7	
3	1				8			6
7				5	2	3		
2	4			8		5		7
		9		2		6		
			5			8		
			7			9		3
	3	6			5			4
4			2				8	5

Difficulty: ★★★ 1/18

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

9	5	8	7	2	6	4	1	3
2	6	3	5	1	4	7	8	9
1	7	4	3	9	8	2	5	6
4	3	2	1	6	7	8	9	5
8	1	7	4	5	9	3	6	2
5	9	6	2	8	3	1	7	4
3	4	1	6	7	5	9	2	8
7	8	5	9	4	2	6	3	1
6	2	9	8	3	1	5	4	7

Difficulty: ★★★ 1/17

©2024 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

OCTOPI, OCTOPUSES, OCTOPODES **Solution: 8 letters**

M	E	D	I	T	E	R	R	A	N	E	A	N	T	S
A	I	P	R	E	Y	C	A	C	(I)	L	E	D	H	I
R	Y	M	O	R	A	N	G	E	(N)	F	L	O	G	Z
I	E	A	I	O	T	F	O	S	(K)	S	R	O	I	E
N	E	S	R	C	L	X	N	S	Q	E	H	F	S	T
E	L	P	M	G	I	A	N	U	N	T	L	A	E	A
G	A	O	I	R	I	W	E	A	P	O	N	E	Y	R
A	H	L	W	L	A	E	E	E	A	D	P	S	E	B
L	W	L	S	R	Z	C	D	T	V	A	B	A	I	E
F	A	A	P	E	A	E	C	E	H	I	L	L	G	T
U	T	C	V	T	F	O	E	S	E	A	S	T	H	R
O	E	S	S	E	A	L	I	M	B	S	W	I	T	E
M	R	U	N	S	S	C	I	T	A	U	Q	A	O	V
A	R	S	T	N	E	G	I	L	L	E	T	N	I	N
C	E	P	H	A	L	O	P	O	D	E	E	P	S	I

©2024 Andrews McMeel Syndication www.wonderword.com 1/18

Aquatic, Arms, Camouflage, Cephalopod, Coast, Crustacean, Defense, Delicacy, Depth, Eels, Eight, Eyesight, Float, Gray, Hawaii, Ink, Intelligent, Invertebrate, Limbs, Marine, Mediterranean, Mimic, Orange, Pool, Prawns, Prey, Salt, Sand, Scallops, Seafood, Shape, Shore, Size, Snails, Soft, Speed, Squeeze, Swim, Vision, Water, Waves, Whale

Yesterday's Answer: Benefits

The NEW **Treasury 57** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

Embiid outshines Jokic in NBA MVPs matchup, leads 76ers past Nuggets

AP

Philadelphia 76ers' Joel Embiid, right, tries to keep away from Denver Nuggets' Nikola Jokic during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2024, in Philadelphia.

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Joel Embiid palmed Nikola Jokic's head and whispered into his ear with the highest of praise one MVP could tell another in the aftermath of an epic showdown.

Embiid told Jokic that his counterpart was "the best player in the league."

With good reason: Jokic does have an NBA Finals MVP and a championship ring. Embiid is doing his best to chase him down.

Embiid had 41 points and 10 assists to lead the Philadelphia 76ers past Jokic and the Denver Nuggets 126-121 on Tuesday night in a battle of the last two NBA MVP s.

Jokic held up his end of a heavyweight showdown with 25 points and 19 rebounds, including 11 offensive boards.

"It's funny, because Twitter, we have a war going on between Philly fans and Denver fans," Embiid said. "It's funny because both of us are just like, who cares? We want to play basketball and win some games. But he deserves (the praise). Until you knock him down, that's the best in the league. He's the finals MVP. Until you take that away, he can claim that.

"But then again, I also believe in myself."

Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points and Tobias Harris had 24 for the Sixers.

Embiid got the better of Jokic late, buoyed by a three-point play that stretched the Sixers' lead. Embiid was fouled on a bucket and crotch-chopped in celebration toward the fans. He made the free throw for a 118-113 lead. Embiid followed with a 3-pointer for an eight-point lead and showed the Sixers are as good as any team when he's healthy—even against the NBA champs.

Embiid gave the Sixers a scare when he fouled Michael Porter Jr. on a 3-point attempt with 26.6 seconds left. Porter hit the three free throws that pulled the Nuggets within four. Time simply ran out on a comeback.

Anyone care for a rematch in June?

"I'm not playing against him, I'm playing against Philadelphia," Jokic said. "It was a good matchup."

Jokic won two straight NBA MVP awards and was beat out last season by Embiid for the honor. Embiid, a two-time defending scoring champ, again leads the league in scoring. Jokic averaged 25.5 points and had Denver rolling with one of the best records in the NBA.

Embiid had his 18th straight 30-point game, tying Hall of Famer Elgin Baylor for the sixth-longest streak in NBA history.

"The card tonight is more than just the big heavyweight matchup," 76ers coach Nick Nurse said ahead of tipoff. "There's a little bit more going on. I think it's going to be worth going out there for tonight to watch it."

He was on target.

The 76ers and Nuggets played one of the most entertaining halves of the season, a 78-all tie, and jolted another packed house onto their feet from the tip.

With a national audience watching and Julius Erving in the house, the stars delivered. Embiid and Maxey combined to make 6 of their first 9 shots for 14 points. Jokic and Jamal Murray, who finished with 17 points and 10 assists, kept pace in the shootout.

The MVPs showed why each could win another one this season. Embiid buried a 3 that cut it to 30-29 only or Jokic to come back and lay it up over the 76ers center for a 32-29 lead.

Embiid placed his hand on Jokic's back when the Serbian dribbled toward the bucket. Embiid was whistled for a reach-in foul and threw his arms in the air in protest. Nurse barked at the officials. The crowd unkindly chanted at the refs what they thought of them.

Kelly Oubre Jr. and Harris finished consecutive alley-oops that sent the crowd into a frenzy. When Murray hit a 3 at the horn, the teams went into halftime tied.

Embiid scored 23 points and the 76ers shot 67% from the floor. Jokic had 15 and Denver shot 58% in the half. The teams combined for 17 3s and both shot over 53% in a half with a frantic, videogame feel.

"This is my first time with this team against these guys," Nurse said. "Where are we compared to these guys? What's it look like up close? I hope we can get something out of that."

Philly sure did: a W.

CLIPPERS 128, THUNDER 117

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Paul George scored 18 of his season-high 38 points in the fourth quarter and the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 128-117 on Tuesday night for their ninth win in 11 games.

Kawhi Leonard and James Harden added 16 points apiece to complete a big day for the franchise. Earlier, Commissioner Adam Silver announced the 2026 All-Star Game will be held at the Clippers' under-construction arena in Inglewood, where they begin play next season.

Jalen Williams scored 25 points and Lu Dort and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander each added 19 points for the Thunder, the West's No. 2 team that has dropped two in a row after winning nine of 12 coming into Los Angeles.

"We gave ourselves every chance to win that game and they outplayed us in the final 3 1/2 minutes," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. "That's how you learn about ourselves. It's exciting to know that we're drawing teams' best punches out of them."

After trailing by 13 points in the third, the Thunder stormed back to lead 115-114 on a 3-pointer by Williams.

That's when George took over.

SUNS 119, KINGS 117

PHOENIX (AP)—Kevin Durant made two free throws with 1.8 seconds remaining and the Phoenix Suns staged a furious comeback to beat the Sacramento Kings 119-117 on Tuesday night.

Grayson Allen tied a franchise record with nine 3-pointers and scored 29 points for the Suns, who trailed 113-96 before closing the game with a 23-4 run. Durant finished with 27 points, then tried to explain how the Suns rallied.

"I have no clue," Durant said. "I usually know how the game is flowing, but I felt like this was a blur. Everything happened so fast. I guess we were all in a zone and locked in.

"They are a team that likes to play a free-flowing movement offense, so when you can disrupt that they turn into a different team. We pressured (Domantas) Sabonis a little bit more. We switched so many screens and made them play 1-on-1."

Devin Booker had 16 points and 11 assists, Bradley Beal scored 13 points and Jusuf Nurkic had 10 points and 15 rebounds for Phoenix.

The Kings led by 22 points with 8:22 to play, but Durant sparked a comeback with a pair of 3-pointers in the fourth quarter. Eric Gordon later made consecutive 3-pointers to tie it at 115. He scored 13 points off the bench.

"We stayed in it. We stayed in the fight mentally," Suns coach Frank Vogel said. "There were a lot of moments where our guys were struggling and frustrated, and we were getting our butts kicked.

NBA fines Sacramento Kings coach Mike Brown $50K after outburst against official

NEW YORK (AP)—The NBA fined Sacramento Kings coach Mike Brown $50,000 on Tuesday for his court-storming outburst against a referee and his laptop-aided criticism of the officiating afterward.

Joe Dumars, the league's head of basketball operations, issued the penalty to Brown for "aggressively pursuing a game official during live play, and for publicly criticizing the officiating" after his team's 143-142 overtime loss to Milwaukee on Sunday night.

Brown was ejected in the fourth quarter. He stormed onto the court and began screaming at referee Intae Hwang. Kings players had to restrain him.

Brown later pulled out a laptop in his postgame media session to highlight a disparity in free throws and multiple calls that he found frustrating.

"The referees are human, and they're going to make mistakes, but you just hope that there's some sort of consistency and there's some sort of communication between the refs," Brown said after the game. "The refs tonight, they were great, they communicated with me all night. But in terms of consistency, you guys saw it right here. In my opinion, the consistency wasn't here tonight."

The Bucks won on Damian Lillard's 3-pointer at the overtime buzzer.

Asked before Tuesday's game against the Suns in Phoenix, Brown was asked if he got an explanation from the league.

"I'm still a little confused, but I'm OK with it. I wanted to illustrate a point and I did that," Brown said. "Now's the time to move forward."

Brown caused laughter among the assembled media during his pregame chat, saying that the fine might affect his All-Star break plans and proceeded to plug a hotel in North Lake Tahoe, Nevada, several times. The resort town is about 2 1/2 hours from Sacramento.

"The fine is what it is," Brown said. "My partner is upset with me because I was going to splurge and take her and my grandson skiing in Lake Tahoe at the All-Star break, but I called her and told her we probably won't be able to do it unless the Ritz-Carlton, which is a terrific place, gives me a discount."

Pistons send Bagley and Livers to Wizards for Gallinari and Muscala

The Detroit Pistons opened up some salary cap space by trading Marvin Bagley III and Isaiah Livers to the Washington Wizards on Sunday.

The Pistons also will send two future draft picks to Washington. ESPN first reported the trade, which was confirmed by several other outlets before the deal received NBA approval later Sunday.

In Detroit at practice Sunday, Pistons coach Monty Williams told reporters he could not comment because the trade was not finalized. The Detroit News captured video at that practice of Bagley and Livers bidding teammates farewell after learning of the deal.

Bagley, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2018 draft, averaged 10.2 points and 4.5 rebounds per game for the Pistons this season. Livers averaged 5.0 points and 2.1 rebounds for Detroit, which has lost 35 of its last 36 games and visits Washington on Monday.

Gallinari averaged 7.0 points and Muscala averaged 4.0 points for the Wizards this season. Washington is 7-31, tied with San Antonio for the second-worst record in the NBA this season ahead of only Detroit.

The move gives Detroit in excess of $60 million in salary cap space for this coming summer. ***(AP)***

Mike Tomlin, Steelers are stuck in NFL purgatory

PITTSBURGH (AP)—Mike Tomlin doesn't change much game to game. Week to week. Year to year.

That almost maniacal consistency is one of the reasons the NFL's longest-tenured head coach has kept the Pittsburgh Steelers competitive in a league where parity is the norm.

The problem, of late anyway, is the results have been consistent for the team Tomlin leads too.

Good. But not good enough.

Competitive. But not competitive enough.

Not when it matters anyway.

Pittsburgh's 31-17 loss to Buffalo in the wild-card round Monday looked an awful lot like many of the playoff setbacks that have come since beating Kansas City in the divisional round in 2016.

The Steelers fell behind early. They scrambled to try and get back in it. The defense could never get that one stop. The offense could never make that one play.

And instead of spending Tuesday beginning preparation for a trip to Baltimore to face the Ravens, Tomlin found himself leading a team-wide exit meeting before beginning the painful post-mortem on a season as challenging as any he's faced.

Though he went viral on Monday night after declining to answer a question about his future—Tomlin smirked, turned to his left and disappeared—there is little reason to think the 51-year-old is burned out or ready to move on.

AP

Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin answers questions during a news conference after losing to the Buffalo Bills in an NFL wild-card playoff football game, Monday, Jan. 15, 2024, in Buffalo, N.Y.

Star outside linebacker T.J. Watt simply answered "no" if he's seen any change in Tomlin this season. Longtime defensive captain Cam Heyward offered an even more impassioned defense of the only man he's played for in his 13 seasons as a pro.

"My thought is he's going to be the coach here," Heyward said on Tuesday. "Mike T wants to be a Pittsburgh Steeler. Is a Pittsburgh Steeler."

A Steeler who needs to find a way to get his team out of purgatory.

While there are plenty of success stories—from the play of rookies Joey Porter Jr. and Broderick Jones to the emergence of second-year running back Jaylen Warren to another AP Defensive Player of the Year-worthy season from Watt—there were nearly as many headaches.

The firing of offensive coordinator Matt Canada in November. Open criticism about the questionable effort level of wide receivers George Pickens and Diontae Johnson. A three-game slide in early December that led Tomlin to turn to third-string quarterback Mason Rudolph in hopes of providing something—anything—to an underachieving offense.

Somehow, the Steelers found a way to find a way, winning their last three games to sneak into the playoffs for the 11th time in Tomlin's tenure.

For the 10th time, that appearance finished without the team adding a Super Bowl trophy to the six that greet Tomlin on his way to work each day. For the fourth straight time, that appearance failed to produce a single playoff win.

It is not "the standard" that Tomlin has so readily embraced since the Steelers hired the then-largely anonymous 34-year-old to replace Bill Cowher in January 2007. And Tomlin knows it. So do his players.

"To be able to put in the work to get in those (playoff) positions and not capitalize makes it ... frustrating," said Watt, who led the NFL with 19 sacks but missed the Buffalo game with a left knee injury.

Watt said on the day he arrived at Saint Vincent College for training camp his goal this season was to advance in the postseason for the first time in his career. Instead, he spent a portion of Tuesday signing jerseys for teammates and wondering what he's going to do to fill the void until organized team activities begin this spring.

"It's strange. It sucks. It's not fun," Watt said. "But only one team gets to feel great after the season. You know, I'm just waiting to have that feeling."

So is a coach that doesn't appear to be heading anywhere.

QUARTERBACK QUANDARY

Kenny Pickett began September with hope and what felt like momentum after a promising preseason. By January he was on the bench watching Rudolph lead the Steelers to the playoffs.

While Pickett figures to be given every chance to be the starter in 2024, he'll need to take a major step forward after throwing a pedestrian six touchdowns against four interceptions in 12 games.

In a conference loaded with talented young quarterbacks, the Steelers can't afford to settle for average play at the most important position on the field.

CAN CAM?

Heyward has spent more than a decade as the heartbeat of the Pittsburgh defense. Whether he returns to give it another go in 2024 is up in the air.

The 34-year-old missed extended time with a groin injury that bothered him since the start of training camp and struggled to find the consistent form that's made him a six-time Pro Bowler and a three-time All-Pro. Heyward has one year left on a contract that will count for more than $22 million against the salary cap.

That's a lot of money for a player in the twilight of his career.

"It's a business first I get that," Heyward said. "But we'll cross that road when we get there."

Eagles center Kelce intends to retire after 13 NFL seasons, AP sources say

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Jason Kelce stood on the sideline in tears as the final seconds ticked off in his likely final NFL game. Kelce embraced his longtime offensive line coach. He removed his helmet once the game ended—a Philadelphia Eagles loss that completed a harrowing season-ending collapse—and extended his hand to his wife and his father in the stands.

What Kelce knew then—what the gregarious center couldn't bring himself to say when he declined to speak to the media in the aftermath of the defeat—was that his football career was over.

The 36-year-old Kelce has wavered on retirement over the last few seasons. Coach Nick Sirianni added to Kelce's lore by shipping a keg of beer to the center's home to entice him to return in 2022.

He has been the heart of the Eagles, a hero on the Philadelphia sports scene, a Super Bowl champion. But after 13 seasons, 156 straight starts and six All-Pro Team selections, Kelce has told teammates he intends to retire, three people informed of the decision told The Associated Press.

They spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity Tuesday out of respect for Kelce's decision, which he has not yet made public.

"The goat!!!. Appreciate ya big time," Eagles cornerback Darius Slay Jr. wrote on social media.

Kelce could explain his decision as early as Wednesday, when the next episode of the "New Heights" podcast he cohosts with his brother, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce—boyfriend of pop star Taylor Swift—was expected to drop. The brothers played each other last season in the Super Bowl that was won by the Chiefs.

"I love him. Yeah, obviously we're not there at that position yet, ready to talk about that, but he's special and I love him," Sirianni said after a 32-9 loss to Tampa Bay. "He's one of the most special guys I've been around. He's always got a place here and always want him to play."

The burly, bushy-haired and bearded Kelce has been a stalwart of the offensive line since he was a sixth-round pick in the 2011 draft out of Cincinnati. He turned into an Iron Man after he missed most of the 2012 season with a partially torn MCL and torn ACL.

Kelce's credentials go far beyond football. He's a podcast cohost. He was the subject of the "Kelce" documentary. Heck, Kelce was even named one of People magazine's Sexiest Men for 2023, alongside Timothée Chalamet and Jamie Foxx.

Swifties flooded social media with homemade videos and tributes for Kelce. And who would have ever guessed that even during training camp?

Her song " Long Live " was a popular choice for social media tributes, in large part due to lyrics that included: "Long live all the magic we made/And bring on all the pretenders/One day, we will be remembered."

One user with Swift as a profile photo wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, "Here I am crying over the loss of Taylor's boyfriend's brother."

Kelce is a beloved Philly personality that has done everything from belting out holiday hits on a pair of Christmas albums and playing celebrity bartender on the beach. Kelce performed the national anthem at a 76ers game and partied with the Phanatic while he pounded a beer to a roaring ovation at a Phillies postseason game.

But the moment that endeared him for life to the Philly faithful came at the Super Bowl parade in 2018 when he dressed as one of Philadelphia's famed Mummers, and the ultimate underdog delivered a fiery, profane speech that whipped the crowd into a frenzy.

"No one likes us! No one likes us! No one likes us! We don't care," Kelce exclaimed. "We're from Philly! (Expletive) Philly. No one likes us! We don't care!"

Eagles QB Jalen Hurts called Kelce a legend.

"He's a legend in the city. Really in the league," Hurts said. "I don't want to do a disservice to him and the things he's been able to do and overcome. His journey to where he is now didn't come easy. It's been a long, long time coming for him, and every year since I've been here it's been, are you going to come back? But he knows how much I love and appreciate him. He knows how much I've learned from him. He'll forever have a special place in my heart."

Kelce was part of Philadelphia's core four of stars that have experienced droughts and championship runs, multiple coaches and one of the worst collapses in the city's sports history. Fletcher Cox and Brandon Graham are the lone holdovers from former coach Andy Reid's last season with the Eagles in 2012. Lane Johnson completes the four veteran anchors and was a rookie in former coach Chip Kelly's first season in 2013.

They won a Super Bowl under former coach Doug Pederson and won just four games in 2020. They've played hurt and set records. They've also raised the standard on what it means to be an Eagles player.

The Core Four is no more. Kelce is the first to call it quits.

"The fact that he's done it for so long so consistently at a very high level, man, it's a special thing," Sirianni said.

INAUGURAL ROTA MARATHON

‘Beauty, enthusiasm, a great race’

Beauty. Enthusiasm. A great race. These are just some of the words being used by participants to describe the first-ever Rota Marathon held on Saturday (Jan. 13) in the Marianas.

Eighty-three registrants signed up for the inaugural race, organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority. In line with Rota’s reputation as “Nature’s Treasure Island,” the event was marked by a tree-planting ceremony at sunset last Friday, Jan. 12, before kicking off in the dark of morning at 4am on Saturday.

Registrants from Russia, USA, Japan, Guam, and The Marianas signed up for the event. Among them was president Kiyokazu Onishi of KFC Triathlon Club of Japan—a longtime partner of the Marianas Visitors Authority in organizing sporting events in the Marianas and a Marianas honorary tourism ambassador.

MVA

Chang Whan Jang heads into the homestretch of Rota Marathon 2024 on Jan. 13, 2024, in the Marianas. At age 71, Jang finished first in the full marathon course, completing the 26.2 miles barefoot.

MVA

Roxanne Soriano of Saipan takes in the view of Alaguan Bay at the Rota Marathon 2024 on Jan. 13, 2024, in the Marianas. The marathon was organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority.

MVA

From left, Dominic Kieffer, Tammy Ackerman, and Scott Smith celebrate their winning half-marathon finishes at the Rota Marathon 2024 on Jan. 13, 2024, in the Marianas. The trio won first place men’s division, first place women’s division, and second place men’s division, respectively.

“The Rota Marathon was my first marathon race in 10 years. I had a great time,” Onishi said, who was joined in his visit by several other Rota-enthusiast friends. “Thanks for a great race.”

The marathon, half-marathon, and 5K course wound their way through the lush forests and along the scenic coast of Rota, renowned for its stunning natural beauty and warm people.

“Our first Rota Marathon surpassed our expectations. From registration numbers to the community’s enthusiasm and participation, it was an all-round success,” said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. “We see good momentum for Rota Marathon to become an annual signature event for the Marianas Visitors Authority and return next January.”

Topping the full marathon was 71-year-old Chang Whan Jang (5:31;47) of Saipan, who ran the 26.2 miles barefoot. The lone female taking on the full marathon was Roxanne Soriano (5:50:44), who was supported by other race friends running alongside her for morale support in the homestretch. The final registrant for the marathon course, Genero Mejia Jr. completed the course in 7:08:56.

First in the half-marathon men’s division was Dominic Kieffer (2:04:28), followed by Scott Smith (2:07:57) and Daniel Depolog (2:21:10). Leading the women’s in the half-marathon were Tammy Ackerman (2:10:46), Julia Mast (2:11:35), and Sarah Faegre (2:47:07).

Most contenders opted for the 5K route, with top finishers being Andrei Chavez (00:22:24), Megumie Takaku Shimada (00:27:25), and Aubrey White (00:28:54). In the men’s division Elphrain Taimanao Jr. (00:25:07) finished first, followed by Peter John White (00:25:27) and Jun Shimada (00:27:19).

Catherine Attao helped organize a contingent of 21 runners—including herself—from the Kanoa Football Club Women’s team under the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association.

“(We) participated in the Rota Marathon as a team builder to kick off our 2024. Our overall experience is priceless,” said Attao. “The beauty that the island holds, the hospitality that we received is truly one of a kind. We are grateful for the opportunity to travel to Rota to participate in the first ever Rota Marathon. It was well coordinated from the registration to the race banquet. It was a wonderful experience! Rota is indeed the friendliest island.”

Event sponsors were Valentino Hotel, Ambros, and Star Marianas. The Rota Mayor Aubry Hocog and the Rota Legislative Delegation—Senate vice president Sen. Donald Manglona (Ind-Rota), Sen. Dennis Mendiola (R-Rota), and Rep. Julie Ogo (Ind-Rota)—strongly supported the event, said Concepcion. Other supporters were the Offices of Governor Arnold Palacios and Lt. Governor David Apatang,

MY WAVE Club, Sasanhaya Service Station, and Rota Municipal Council. Concepcion also recognized the MVA Rota team of David Atalig, Alfred Maratita, Dre Manglona, and Jovito Reyes.

“The teamwork was incredible,” said Concepcion. “Air service for the event was a factor, and we thank Star Marianas for their strong support in offering charter services, providing passengers a refund on their race registration fees upon proof of payment, and doubling that upon proof of race completion. It was a positive contribution to incentivizing travel to Rota.”

Rota is 30 minutes from the capitol island of Saipan via light aircraft. Concepcion said the MVA has also reached out to Star Marianas to request the addition of extra flights. The airline also offers charter flights.

The Marianas Visitors Authority’s next sporting event will be Saipan Marathon on March 9, 2024, featuring a full marathon, half-marathon, 10K and 5K. For more information, visit www.mymarianas.com. ***(MVA)***

TMS

From page 20

TMS drew first blood in the second inning from a run by Justin Garde after an RBI-base hit by Sablan. HMS then had a brief upperhand in the fourth inning from two runs by Jequinn Lizama and Jesse Santos to make it 2-1.

The third inning was an easy 1-2-3 for HMS pitcher Jesus Santos, and their offense kicked up again with a run in the fifth inning for a two run, 3-1 lead.

It was still anyone’s game and the Tatagas didn’t let up as they took back the lead by one run from three consecutive runs. Tatagas’ Carl Hocog started the onslaught by a leadoff single, then was brought home by Aiken Norita, who then rounded home from Sablan’s single. Sablan then scored the third run, for a 4-3 lead.

HMS tied it up quickly, 4-4, after a steal of home plate as K.J. Schardt caught TMS’ pitcher Leon Neth sleeping. In the next inning, TMS tried to stack up more runs but couldn’t and the game was still at a deadlock.

The last inning saw wasted opportunities from HMS as they went down in order once again—and with TMS as the home team, they had the final at-bat that allowed them to walk it off.

Tatagas coach Neil Camacho was clearly excited and happy that their school won the first championship. He said in an interview after the game, “It’s amazing. This is the first ever experience for me and Mr. Adam [Salalila] and Tanapag Middle School, and it’s been an honor. It’s been an experience. There’s a lot of adrenaline rush and we’re super happy and proud of the boys. We can’t be any happier with all the effort they put out there on the field and the sportsmanship they showed.

Co-coach Salalila, for his part, said that this inaugural league is “great for the community students, for everybody to come out and watch and support. Also, for the students to learn this sport. They can take it all the way and with all the stuff they learned on the field, for sure they’ll bring it up to the next step in high school.”

The coaches thanked Kyle Hocog from the Saipan Baseball League and his team at Next Level Media, the students, their families, and parents.

LEIGH GASES

Champions Tanapag Middle School and second place Hopwood Middle School pose for a group photo during the awards ceremony of the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 last Saturday morning at the Capital Hill Softball Field.

Sablan, the star of the game, was interviewed as well. He said it felt good to hit the walk off run and said in his mind during the at-bat, he would either hit the ball or strike out. But, he said, “I had confidence, hit the ball, and got the win.”

As for the season, he said it was a good one as his team went through hardships, played with good teamwork, and communicated well to get to the championship.

The freshman-to-be next school year then gave a shout out to his team, his dad E.J. and his family.

TMS included Sablan, Jose, Hocog, Ayden Magofna, Sinahi Santos, Aiken Norita, Maximus Tomokane, Avenbert Kaipat, Justin Garde, Leon Neth, Mark Rogopes, Lexy Santos, Ziah Sablan, Abraham Falig, Debron Saures, Dyson Danis, and William Flores.

Rota’s Sinapalo Elementary School Bucks settled for third place after they lost to HMS, 6-7. The Public School System Boys Middle School Volleyball League 2023-2024 was held with help from the Saipan Baseball League.

LADY

From page 20

the second.

Three more runs would come in for the Lady Blue Jays in the second and fourth inning, bringing their total to 10 runs.

Only four hits were made by Lady Sufa throughout, and the game ended early via run-mercy ruling.

In the next game, the 670 Magas Babes bossed the Boleras around as they defeated them, 15-6.

It was a high-scoring second inning for the Babes with 12 of their runs made in that inning alone. The Boleras’ runs trickled in slowly as they scored one in the first and three in the second, but were down by a lot come the third inning.

The Babes’ Rachel Salila and Ta’ann Demapan scored their team’s final two runs in the fourth, but by then, they had a commanding 15-4 lead. The Boleras could only score two more runs and called it quits early as they couldn’t bridge the big gap any longer.

The final women’s division game was a close win for Team BDE over Bat & Boujee, 6-5.

Team BDE scored all their six runs by the third inning and thought they would get away with the win easily as Bat & Boujee had scored just two runs, but Bat & Boujee tried to rally in the last inning.

Their effort came up short however, as they could only conjure three more runs and Team BDE bounded to their first victory.

The 2024 BASA master’s and women’s league is played every Sunday at the Dandan Softball Field, with the first game at 9am and the last game at 4pm.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Lady Blue Jays team poses for a photo during the opening day of the 2024 Budweiser Belau Amateur Softball Association last Sunday at the Dandan Softball Field.

HESS

From page 20

three days back-to-back waking up around 3am to set up these events and run them then break down. Thank you very much to our officials.” He also thanked the media in their early morning weekend coverage.

The 2025 Trinity Race is also now live at https://raceroster.com/events/2025/84897/trinity-2025.

Embiid outshines Jokic in NBA MVPs matchup, leads 76ers past Nuggets.

PAGE 17

Saipan Tribune
Sports

'Beauty, enthusiasm, a great race'.

PAGE 19

Hess, Taflinger overall Trinity winners, Top 10 honored

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

It's no surprise that Swiss visitor Martin Hess and student-athlete Addalee Taflinger are the overall winners in their respective divisions of the Run Saipan 2024 Trinity Race as they topped all days of the series from last Saturday to last Monday.

The cumulative time for all three days—the Beach Road 10K, the Mt. Tapochau 5K, and the Route 30 Drag Strip 5K—was collected and Hess, who was first place in all three, had the fastest time of 1:21:40, while Taflinger had a total time of 1:49:55.

Both Hess and Taflinger said they weren't really expecting to be first in all the races. This is the first time for both runners to join the race, with Taflinger saying it was "exhausting" all around.

Hess also said he's never raced in 5Ks or 10Ks before, usually opting for the longer distances of marathons back home. Nevertheless, they won the shiny new overall prism-like trophy from Run Saipan.

Top 9 overall in the men's division after Hess is Sildrey Veloria at 1:27:37; third was Victor Nash Santos with a time of 1:28:27; Simon Tang was fourth at 1:34:06; Shigeki Tenorio ran a total of 1:37:54; Landen Taflinger beat his dad Chad with a time of 1:38:01; Chad Taflinger was a minute behind at 1:39:02; Ronald Villafria clocked in at 1:41:52; Adam Walsh had a time of 1:44:25; and Aaron Pamintuan wrapped it up at 1:50:52.

Behind the 13-year-old Taflinger was Shawna Brennfleck with a time of 1:52:38; Ann Bang was third with a time of 1:55:23; Addalee's mom, Angela Taflinger, had a time of 2:02:52; Kathy Ruszala's overall time was 2:09:23; Marilou Carlos was at 2:11:02; Cherie Moses clocked in at 2:13:55; Sheila Mabutas' total was 2:15:22; Addalee's little sister, Kaylen, came in at 2:16:20; and Marjorie Ganacias made the Top 10 with a time of 2:16:15.

LEIGH GASES

Overall winners of the Run Saipan 2024 Trinity race, Martin Hess, second right, and Addalee Taflinger, second left, pose with their trophies and medals, along with Run Saipan president Edward Dela Cruz Jr. far right, and the mastermind of the event, Run Saipan's Dr. Ron Snyder, last Monday at the former Mariana Resort.

In an interview after the race, Run Saipan president Edward Dela Cruz Jr. said that the turnout for all three days was "amazing" as they decided to open the races up individually, not just as a three-day package."

They had 60 runners during the three days and 44 who finished the whole event. Dela Cruz said they even had one runner from Tinian, Benny Gabor, join the race virtually because he had really wanted to join. Dela Cruz said, "Since we don't do races out there yet we let him do it with heavy stipulations of course. He had to run at the same time in every race and the same format and I tracked it on Strava."

He then congratulated Hess and Addalee "for beating a stacked field of runners. This year we had an even more stacked and competitive field than last. We had so many of Saipan's fastest runners competing that it was great. I'm so glad to have witnessed them all. Next year I hope they can defend their titles. Also, amazing work to everyone who finished all three race days. It's not easy to give up sleeping in on your first three-day weekend of the year and completely destroy your legs and feet."

He added, "We promised runners that they will be challenged not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well. Amazing work everyone."

Dela Cruz then thanked IT&E for sponsoring this year's race. He also thanked their partner Northern Marianas Athletics "for officiating and sanctioning the first competitive road race of the year. Thank you to Marianas High School National Honor Society and American Red Cross as well. Special recognition to our volunteers this weekend. It's very hard to commit

See HESS on Page 19

Lady Blue Jays, 670 Magas Babes, BDE start season strong

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The women's division teams—The Lady Blue Jays, 670 Magas Babes, and Team BDE—started the 2024 Budweiser Belau Amateur Softball Association season strong in the first day of games last Sunday at the Dandan Softball Field.

The first game of the women's division in the morning between the Lady Blue Jays and Lady Sufa was a shutout 10-0 Lady Blue Jays win.

The Lady Blue Jays owned the diamond and got their bats cracking early with three consecutive runs scored by the Top 3 in their lineup. Kianu Aldan hit an inside-the-park home run that brought in Brittney Gopez, followed by a triple by Kiana Camacho who came home from a single by Amy Cabrera.

Four more consecutive runs scored before the third out registered. Lady Sufa could not get past Lady Blue Jays pitcher Angel Deleon Guerrero who was throwing heaters. She sat down the first three batters in the first inning, followed by retiring the next few batters in

See LADY on Page 19

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

An incomplete 670 Magas Babes softball team poses for a photo during the opening day of the 2024 Budweiser Belau Amateur Softball Association last Sunday at the Dandan Softball Field.

TMS walks it off to boys softball crown

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Benigno Sablan walked it off in style in the last inning to win the championship for Tanapag Middle School Tatagas in the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 last Saturday at the Capital Hill Softball Field.

Tied at 4-4 with Hopwood Middle School Hilitais heading into the last inning, the bases were set up perfectly for Sablan with two runners on base. Then, with one swing of the bat, he hit the walk-off RBI single that brought home Rex Jose, much to the excitement of the Tatagas, but to the disappointment of the Hilitais.

See TMS on Page 19

LEIGH GASES

Champions Tanapag Middle School and second place Hopwood Middle School pose for a group photo during the awards ceremony of the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 last Saturday morning at the Capital Hill Softball Field.